

THEORY AND PRACTICE IN SOCIAL INTERVENTION:
THE CASE OF VOLUNTARY ACTION ON UNEMPLOYMENT

by

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Abstract

The main aim of the study is to examine how knowledge and theory are applied by practitioners in community work and social work. The task begins with a critique of conventional formulations of the relationship of theory and practice in social work, and proceeds to an analysis of concepts of knowledge, theory and explanation. A general typology of knowledge is put forward, and it is argued that the extremely loose and variable usage of 'theory' in the literature is better replaced by a more specific conception which emphasises theory as the means of creating explanations. It is argued that explanations can be of two kinds, designated conformity and causal explanations.

The field selected for the formulation and testing of an exploratory model of how practitioners do use theory, was action by small local voluntary organisations around the problems and issues of unemployment. A postal survey in Scotland suggested that two basic approaches were prevalent, referred to as the welfare and prevention models.

The major empirical component of the research comprised in-depth studies of a number of practitioners and their organisations drawn from four classes: volunteer bureaux, councils of voluntary service, unemployed workers' centres, and community businesses. It is shown that the organisations, contrary to what is supposed in conventional justifications of the voluntary sector, were severely limited in their freedom and capacity to initiate programmes and develop innovative responses to newly emerging social welfare problems.

The analysis of practitioners' action demonstrates that the standard conceptions of how practitioners use theory are fundamentally defective, at least in a field such as the one selected where substantive theory suited to the problems is largely lacking. It is argued that practitioners draw upon a set of action beliefs and dispositions, as opposed to theory in any rigorous sense; and that they are directed not by knowledge, but by a sense of knowing. This is their guide in an environment of inevitable high uncertainty. Their response to each instance is mediated by a process of practical reasoning in which what they rely upon is much less rigorous than theory, but draws much more widely from the entirety of their knowledge and life experience.

Declaration

I DECLARE that this thesis has been composed by myself; and that the research which it reports is my own work.

Chris Clark

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Many people have given me indispensable help in pursuing this project. I am grateful firstly to those who have been the subject of the research, who not only tolerated the intrusion but were warm in their welcome and open in their willingness to share their time and experience. It was a real pleasure and a privilege to meet them.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and overview

'Efficient practice precedes the theory of it.' (Ryle, 1973, p. 31)

The field of this research is voluntary social action. It is concerned with non-statutory social service and campaigning organisations whose objects include new or alternative services for identified groups within the general population. Specifically, the study will examine practitioners and their practice in a range of small voluntary bodies concerned to address unemployment and its effects. The empirical work at the core of the study was based in Scotland.

The leading themes of this study are, however, more central and fundamental than the particularities of the actions of a number of individuals and their organisations at a certain time and in an arguably somewhat marginal area of social welfare practice. The key research interest which I intend to pursue is the relationship between practitioners' beliefs, theories and values, and their practical actions. In the shorthand of social work and its literature, this is often posed as the problem of the 'relationship of theory and practice'. This study is informed by a social work perspective, but is critical of traditional formulations and descriptions of the theory-practice relationship in social work. The basic project therefore is to propose an account of 'theory' and 'practice' which is both theoretically coherent and grounded in the systematic observation and disciplined interpretation of practitioners' action.

The theory-practice problem in social work could potentially be explored in almost any practice field. The choice of voluntary action on unemployment was based on the following considerations, which in turn partly define the issues which this study can most persuasively address.

Voluntary social action is an attractive subject for studying theory and practice because its practitioners often express their values and objectives in a highly visible and self-

conscious way. The existence and purpose of voluntary social welfare organisations is typically justified in essentially ideological terms; in a certain sense the whole point of the organisations is their members' conception of the reforms and changes they wish to bring about. The aims are self-defined and self-chosen in a way which is not characteristic of statutory organisations, which aside from having their purposes defined by law are also large and complex formal bureaucracies whose dynamics profoundly influence what practitioners aim and are able to do. By focusing the study on small voluntary organisations therefore, it seemed that it might be possible to get access to practitioners' beliefs and motivations uncomplicated by some of the restraints experienced by their counterparts in large formal organisations.

The choice of unemployment as the problem focus was due partly also to its being a most pressing public concern at the time this study was designed. Social welfare organisations in both the statutory and voluntary sectors were faced with the sudden arrival of a huge social problem which they were scarcely equipped to deal with. Unemployment is a hard case for social welfare; it raises very starkly the question of whether small-scale intervention with individuals or at the level of local communities is an appropriate or effective response to a state of affairs which is largely macroeconomic in origin. It seemed therefore that the prominence of unemployment would provide a useful focus for a study of theory, since the conditions and effects of unemployment demand to be addressed. Furthermore, the topical nature of the problem meant that some of the research results would probably be of interest to a wider constituency, not limited to those concerned with the more purely theoretical questions of this study.

The practice activities which are scrutinised in the empirical components of this study belong to the type of social intervention known, not entirely without risk of ambiguity, as community work. In due course I shall examine its literature and clarify what is meant by the term. There is inevitably some question as to whether community work in the voluntary sector is truly representative, for the purposes of this study, of social work in general; and even whether it should be counted as part of social work at all. It has to be accepted that there is no resolution of this question which will accord with the views of every practitioner or commentator. I have taken the position that community work, whatever may be its points of difference with other forms of social intervention, is sufficiently closely related to the main body of social work for it to constitute a valid example. The reasons for this position will be discussed further in Chapter 4. I have in addition followed the conventional view that the 'methods' of social work, to be further examined in Chapter 2, are essentially similar irrespective of

whether the practice is carried on from the statutory organisations which dominate contemporary social work in Britain or from the voluntary organisations which provide the case study for this research. Although there is very little empirical research on this question, the texts which define the theory to be discussed are predicated on such an assumption.

On the basis that community work provides a perfectly serviceable arena in which to test the relationship of theory and practice, an additional factor in the choice of field was that community work and voluntary social action was the area of practice with which I had most familiarity. For reasons which will be debated later, this offered some important practical advantages in carrying out the empirical part of this study.

Certain limitations which follow from this design approach should also be noted. It will become apparent that the subject practitioners of the research were in many ways working in the dark, and that this condition was aggravated by the fact that unemployment of all things is a largely unknown area for workers in social welfare. This study therefore has perhaps a greater bearing on the condition of workers who are forced to work as it were without 'theory' because authoritative formulations of it do not exist. It may have less bearing on the status of workers who in principle might draw upon extensive formal knowledge relevant to their field of activity. However, I shall argue for a conception of knowledge, and I shall offer an explanation of the sources and the manner in which practitioners use knowledge, which I believe to be generally relevant.

This study then aims, by means of a critical description of the work of certain voluntary action organisations and of influences upon them, and by analysis of the experience and world view of a number of their practitioners, to reformulate the traditional accounts of practitioners' use of 'theory' in 'practice'. Because the focus is specifically on theory, it may occasionally seem that the portrayal of practitioners and their situations is somewhat one-sided, and leaves out much of the lively complexity of their multiple everyday realities. This will, I hope, be acceptable in its context as an abstraction to serve a specific purpose.

The study uses a number of approaches to gathering and selecting pertinent information. The field was mapped in the first place by examination of the literature and by means of a brief survey in which quantitative methods of analysis were employed. This was followed by more detailed qualitative field studies using semi-structured interviews and

direct observation. The emphasis here was on understanding and interpreting practitioners' actions and the meanings they attached to them. Throughout the empirical work, the main concern was always to advance understanding of practitioners' use of theory, rather than to compile a census or construct an ethnography merely for their own sakes. The study as a whole is therefore as much, if not more, an essay in the theory of knowledge as a narrative of a particular segment of social action. And because any study of theory as such has a peculiarly reflexive quality, rather special attention has been given to explicating and debating the theoretical assumptions on which the enterprise rests.

The plan of the thesis is as follows. The argument begins in Chapter 2 with a theoretical analysis of what is meant by knowledge and theory, with special reference to the traditional doctrines prevalent in social work, and to their inadequacies. A number of key ideas are developed which inform the subsequent enquiries. In Chapter 3 these ideas are extended to provide a methodological foundation appropriate to the topic of the research, and an exploratory 'dynamic hypothesis' is formulated.

Chapters 4 and Chapter 5 between them comprise a broad empirical description of the field of voluntary social action on unemployment. This is based on a study of the literature and on a postal survey carried out in Scotland in 1985.

In Chapter 6 the methodological arguments of Chapter 3 are applied to the construction of detailed methods of data collection and analysis for the qualitative field studies. The framework for these studies of a number of small organisations and their practitioners is explained.

The findings of the field studies are collated under two broad headings. Chapter 7 describes the organisations and the world in which the practitioners worked, amplifying and giving depth to the picture which emerged from the survey. Chapter 8 is devoted to the beliefs and dispositions which animated the practitioners' actions, and recounts in some detail the content of their views.

The final chapter extends the analysis of practitioners' views and the significance of their situation in order to postulate a theory of how practitioners use knowledge in practice. Drawing from the material that has gone before, the various themes of this study are integrated into a reformulation of the theory-practice problem. While such a formulation can never (as I shall argue) be definitive, I hope to show that it can with

benefit replace the traditional conception in social work.

In the course of this study I shall adopt a number of technical terms to denote important concepts not readily available from the literature. An index of these is given in the Appendix.

CHAPTER 2

Knowledge, theory and practice

2.1 'Theory' in social work

In the social work literature there is a recurrent concern to define social work theory, articulate and defend its content, and advocate its use. The frequency of the topic does betray some not insignificant uncertainty; for unlike many fields where the importance of theory as such can safely be taken for granted, in social work theory evidently has a dubious status. For a professional or would-be professional activity, this is potentially embarrassing. The reasons for the dubiety will be discussed in the following pages.

Before embarking on a discussion of social work theory, it must first be accepted that a very wide range of signification is validly attached to the concept of theory. It can mean almost anything from a specific scientific explanation to metaphysical speculation: it is inclusive to the point of self-contradiction. There is little to be gained from lamenting this vagueness and untidiness, but it is definitely necessary to establish a more precise conception if we are to make any progress at all on the issue of the relationship of theory to practice. I shall therefore examine how 'theory' is used in social work as a preliminary to advancing a specific and narrower conception intended to facilitate an analysis of the theory-practice problem both theoretically and empirically. I shall take the view that the essence of a theory is that it serves to describe systematically or explain economically, certain natural or social phenomena. Moreover I shall argue that a person may accept a theory as true without necessarily putting into action the precepts which implicitly or explicitly follow from it. I shall seek to show that, although the conception of theory I advance does in its restriction of meaning owe a recognisable debt to the empiricist tradition, nevertheless it avoids the well known objections to positivism as a social theory and theory of scientific knowledge.

A number of inter-related themes can be distinguished in the literature about social work theory. Perhaps inevitably, nearly everyone who tackles the subject feels obliged to offer a definition. It would certainly be tedious, and probably unprofitable, to

survey these definitions comprehensively. It will be sufficient for the moment to record some trends amidst the diversity, and realise that there is no consensus about what 'theory' means or what theory is.

A simple, or rather simplistic, approach to the definition of theory in social work is to equate it with virtually any kind of mental construct; as Timms and Timms (1977, p.17) point out, 'theory' is often confused with 'concept'. A somewhat similar disposition is apparent in the slang of social work courses where what is expounded in the university or college is called 'theory', in contrast to what is learned through experience in placement. Barbour (1984, p. 558), for example, recorded students' usage of the term 'theory' as 'anything covered in class and thus learnt at university rather than in the placement situation'. Nursing is among the many other occupational groups which use a similar slang (Melia, 1987). The inadequacy of this conception scarcely needs to be spelled out; to treat theory as synonymous with any kind of thought or knowledge is to render the concept valueless, and the idea of science unintelligible.

Many writers in social work adopt, explicitly or implicitly, a notion of theory visibly influenced by empiricism. Reay (1986, p.50), for example, defines a theory as 'a set of related concepts which can be tested systematically to verify (or not verify) their validity'. Specht (1977, p.34) likewise claims that a theory should 'present a body of concepts that are organised in a series of inter-related propositions that can be tested in practice'. Thomas (1983, p.252) defines theory as 'a set of tested or testable propositions, ideas or hypotheses that contribute to our understanding of what we do, why we do it and with what effects'. In a recent text Howe (1987, p. 12) declares that 'a theory may . . . now be defined as a set of concepts and propositions that present an organised view of phenomena'. We may overlook any flaws in these definitions to note the common theme of a body of interrelated and, especially, testable propositions.

There are a number of objections to be made to these notions. In the first place, they include entities which are not theories according to the empiricist assumptions of their advocates. For example, there is a valid distinction to be made between theories and hypotheses; although both have the same logical form of a body of interrelated and testable propositions, a theory is advanced on the basis that it does provide the best available explanation of the phenomena it is concerned with, while a hypothesis is advanced merely on the basis that it might lead to a good explanation - if the tests which it suggests turn out as predicted. As Ryan (1970, p.95) puts it, those who

produce theories generally do make existential claims about the world. It cannot be satisfactory to claim that any body of interconnected concepts and propositions merits the status of theory.

Secondly these notions of theory in the social work literature are too elastic in that they permit the inclusion of substantive theories whose adequacy to furnish satisfactory explanations is, from the empiricist standpoint of their authors, very dubious. Many writers show an awareness that most social work theories have difficulty in qualifying under strict canons of empiricist rectitude. Simon (1970), in her contribution to the authoritative text of its time on 'theories of social casework', suggests that none of the 'theories' put forward therein is a 'complete' theory, 'entirely coherent and consistent in the relationship of its parts'. Specht (1977) says that 'a good deal of the theory that practitioners use is not explicit and does not meet the requirements that scientists would set for an "acceptable" theory'. All these doubts are reinforced by the contentious nature of much of the content of theory in the social sciences.

Thirdly, the notion of theory used by these writers is too broad in the further sense that it tends to be expanded beyond the boundaries of the proper business of theories which, at any rate within the empiricist tradition, centres on understanding and explanation and excludes prescriptions for action which embody moral or political principles. For example, Reay (1986) goes on to say that a theory should be 'formulated as a framework for understanding, action and evaluation'; Loewenberg (1984) says that a relevant theory should meet the functions of setting boundaries to social work practice, and socialisation to professional norms and values; Howe (1987) claims that theories enable the user to control and bring about. Argyris and Schön (1977), writing from a more general perspective, postulate 'theories of action' which 'determine all deliberate behaviour', and these 'theories of action' are of the same logical order as conventional scientific theories. But such conceptions of the role of social work or any other practical discipline necessarily have some moral and political content, and thus they go beyond value-free empiricist theory. At the same time they cast doubt on the legitimacy of theory for its own sake; this point will be pursued later.

There exists, then, an orthodoxy that social work practice is based on theories intelligible as such from what is perhaps a rather old fashioned understanding of the empiricist standpoint. The mainstream of social work has borrowed a conception of theory from empiricism, and proceeded thence to claim for social work theories the properties of empirical theory (Bernstein, 1979). The argument is doubly flawed:

firstly because much of what is conventionally designated as social work theory is not theory in the sense recognised by empiricism, and secondly because (as I shall argue further) empiricist theory is anyway inadequate to deal with the practical and moral character of social work. I have proposed elsewhere that social work, for reasons based on professional insecurity, has clung to a positivistic conception of social science which is poorly suited to its moral character as well as to the exigencies of actual practice (Clark with Asquith, 1985). Despite all this, there is also and concurrently a fairly wide agreement that social work 'theory' can be conceived at three levels, of which however only one bears unambiguously the hallmarks of theory within the empiricist paradigm. While different writers use different terminology, the general outlines of this typology are discernible in many sources. Timms and Timms (1977, p.17) adopt a classification similar to the one used here, saying that 'theory' in social work can refer to at least three possibilities: (i) about what constitutes or justifies social work (ii) about how to do social work (iii) propositions from the social sciences.

The first 'level' of theory is identical with theories borrowed from the social sciences, especially psychology and sociology. Simon (1970) refers to 'behavioural science foundations'; Leonard (1977) to 'descriptive and explanatory' theory; Evans (1976) to 'theories of practice'; Hearn (1982) to 'academic theory'; Paley (1984) to a 'hard core of social scientific knowledge'. Brown (in DHSS, 1978, p. 135) defines two sorts of theory: explanations of human behaviour and problems, and models of intervention. Thomas (1983, p.254) refers to 'explanatory theories' which 'try to explain the existence and operation of social and political structures, institutions and processes'. Hardiker and Barker (1981), following Evans, devote a text to 'theories of practice', and Breakwell and Rowett (1982) espouse a similar project. Some writers, for example Loewenberg (1984) and Pilalis (1986), divide this first level into 'grand-range' theory such as Freudian and Marxian, and 'middle-range' (after Merton) theory such as labelling or ego psychology; while Howe (1987) emphasises the sociological 'paradigms' within which such theories may be located.

The second level is very often referred to as 'practice theory', a term found in common use as well as in the speculations of social work writers. Thomas (1983, p.253) defines it as the "'how-to-do-it" theory that helps people understand the numerous tasks in the doing of community work'. Evans (1976), in his widely quoted article, says that practice theory denotes that which is 'implicit in what social workers do'. Specht (1977, p.34-35) defines 'practice wisdom' as that which 'has not been rigorously and systematically described, measured and tested', but which comprises 'directions and

guides for action'. Simon (1970) suggests that 'casework practice theory' might better in the current state of development be thought of as comprising a number of 'approaches'. Similarly Thomas (1983, p.106) identifies five principal 'approaches' to community work, i.e. community action, community development, social planning, community organisation, service extension. Leonard (1977, p.71) defines one of the two types of social work theory as 'prescriptive', which 'attempts to outline principles and strategies for action within particular contexts', while Hearn (1982) counterposes the 'academic' theory mentioned above with 'professional' theory. Pilalis (1986) avers that practice theories are comprised of practice principles derived both from experience in the field and from mid-range and grand-range theories. What all these conceptions have in common are the ideas that practice theory is derived at least in part from practitioners' experience of helping, or delivering a service; that it should directly inform practice; and the admission that this type of 'theory' is rather poorly validated. Lee (1982) is one author who expands these themes.

At the third level there are what Howe (1987, p.166) refers to as 'theories of social work' which 'seek to say something about the nature, purpose and character of social work itself'. Despite Hearn's (1986) claim that 'there is no theory of theory and practice' - which indeed is the very theme of this thesis - the nature of social work is in fact constantly debated.

The orthodoxy may thus be summarised as follows: social work knowledge is based on validated social science theory; practice consists in the eclectic application of social science somehow mediated through 'practice theory'. I have already argued that this doctrine is internally inconsistent with its own premisses concerning theory and is therefore incoherent. I shall seek next to show additional grounds that it is seriously defective both as an empirical account of theory in social work and as a prescription for the application of theory.

2.2 Relating theory and practice in social work

The orthodox doctrine on social work theory, clad as we have seen in an ill-fitting cloak of empiricism, has led to a number of traditional fallacies about the relationship

of theory and practice. It is no surprise that social work theorists fervently wish to demonstrate the relevance of theory to practice, but typical formulations of how this should be done succeed only in underlining the problem. Haines (1975, p. 11), for instance, has this to say about social science knowledge and social work practice:

Such knowledge can sometimes be applied directly to human situations, but more often it forms a background to practise [sic] on which the social worker can draw when appropriate, preferably in an integrated fashion that does not require distinctions to be made between subject areas.

Statements of this kind do nothing to enlarge our understanding about how theory is applied or applicable to practice, if at all. The problem is not just one for theorists, because there is ample evidence that practising social workers find it hard to explain what theory (if any) they are using. As one of the respondents in Stevenson and Parsloe's study (DHSS, 1978, para. 5.262) put it:

'I often feel that I'm acting far more from instinct than from knowledge really or skills . . . I'm working very intuitively sometimes . . . when I read the book I'm often relieved to find that I've done the right thing'.

Waterhouse's (1987) study of recent ex-students' grasp of theory confirms an old suspicion that academic theory is usually very far from the front of the practitioner's mind.

The first of the traditional fallacies is the notion that social work has a 'knowledge base'. Statements to this effect can be found in practically any textbook. Roberts and Nee (1970, p. xvi), for example, asked each of their contributors to specify the 'behavioural science foundations' pertinent to the school they represented. Reid and Smith (1981, p. 3) open their text with the statement that 'since its beginnings, social work has attempted to develop a scientific base for its practice'. Haines (1975, p. 11) is optimistic enough to claim that social work has a 'firmly rooted knowledge base'. The notion of a 'base' seems to imply that the knowledge it contains is in some sense prior to, or necessary to, the practice which it is supposed to inform; it implies that without the knowledge base, there could be no proper basis for intervention. But it takes only a moment's reflection to see that this is not how knowledge is used in practice. There are many areas of social work where relevant social science knowledge is very little or not at all developed, and others where profound controversies exist. Further, few practitioners can be immodest enough to claim a thorough familiarity even with all the knowledge that does exist which would be relevant to their own practice: yet still they practise. The conclusion here is that whatever may be the role of knowledge, it is

misleading to think of it as a base. Polansky (1975, p.2-3) explicitly recognises that practice often proceeds without any very clearly identified scientific knowledge:

It is well that social work, for example, did not wait to base its practice on scientific findings, for to this day we have barely enough of them to steer 10 percent of an average worker's day.

Knowledge for social work, therefore, is not logically or temporally prior to practice. Polansky (1975, p.5) in fact goes so far as to say that 'historically, nearly all relevant treatment innovations have come from direct practice' [as opposed to research].

Sheldon (1978, p. 5) uses a modified version of the idea of a knowledge base which moves away from thinking of it as prior to practice; it is more in the nature of a bank, or 'knowledge pile'. This is helpful for dealing with the belief that knowledge is necessarily antecedent to practice but still leaves an implication that practice must necessarily draw on some kind of scientific knowledge. I wish to argue that this is often untrue, partly because of the widely acknowledged deficiencies of social science, but more particularly because too much is left out of the account of how practice is conceptualised in the practitioner's mind.

The second traditional fallacy concerns the near-sacrosanct doctrine that there exist a number of 'methods of social work', usually enumerated as casework, groupwork, community work and residential work. My objection to this is as follows. When we speak of a method we denote a way of achieving a certain end, or ends: a method only makes sense when it is clear what it is supposed to achieve - a method is for something. The point of having a method is that it spells out, in more or less detail, what it is we should do to achieve the specified ends. We might say, for example, that maintaining an at-risk register is a method (or better, one of a group of linked methods) for managing the risks to various persons' welfare and freedom in situations of potential child abuse; or, that starting a community resource centre is a method for enabling local residents to have a more effective say in matters of local concern. Now, to refer to casework, groupwork and the rest as 'methods of social work' is unsatisfactory on several counts. It might seem to imply that social work is itself some sort of end in its own right: but this is implausible. Few people other than those involved in delivering social work can have much interest in sustaining the activity of social work as an end in itself, and to claim otherwise would be a poor defence of social work's use of resources. To escape this blind alley, it is usual to speak of social work as a means of achieving certain objectives, such as social welfare. This tactic is of little avail since it fails to

distinguish between social work and a whole host of activities with broadly humanitarian goals. If anything is certain in social work it is that its aims are, as Emmett (1967, p.15-16) pointed out, both controversial and difficult to state. To talk of the traditional 'methods' therefore does not enlighten us on what they are methods for, but simply begs the question. To say that casework is a method of social work says nothing about what it is supposed to achieve: the statement is empty. It does not tell us in anything but the most unspecific terms what goals are intended, nor does it lead to any explanation of how the 'method' serves the purported end.

I do not, of course, mean to imply that the many activities carried out under the umbrella of social work have no purpose. The point is that when one examines the purposes implicitly and explicitly adopted in different social work activities one finds that they are certainly very varied, and sometimes possibly contradictory. Stevenson and Parsloe (DHSS, 1978, para 5.94) found in area teams that 'Rarely . . . were there broad similarities of emphasis, involvement and purpose across client groups'. This observation should encourage us finally to discard the conception of 'methods of social work' in favour of an analysis which treats the purposes of any so-called 'method' not as a given, but as a variable to be examined in the case of every piece of social work. In fact, as we shall see later, every piece of practice must at least be understood in relation to the aims its practitioners embrace, the methods they adopt, and the context within which the work is performed.

The third fallacy concerns the familiar idea that good social work should 'integrate', or at any rate 'link', theory and practice. As Bogo and Vayda (1986, p.2) comment, 'integration of theory and practice . . . , without examination, may be a kind of magical incantation, through which educators, like alchemists, hope to transform a social work student into a professional social worker'. It must be a commonplace observation that many apparently perfectly competent practitioners seem to find this oddly difficult to do explicitly. Stevenson and Parsloe (DHSS, 1978, para. 5.261) quote a worker who said: 'If you asked me to state a theory here and now, I wouldn't have a clue but my thinking and practice have been formed by them'.

The struggles of learners as well as more seasoned workers to 'integrate theory and practice' are a daily experience for social work teachers. All these observations should warn us that there is probably something radically wrong with the whole concept of 'integrating theory and practice'. A number of difficulties are quickly apparent.

Firstly, as we have already seen, the very idea of social work theory is hardly straightforward. Many writers raise the doubt that there can be any such thing: social work, it is said, derives its theoretical principles from various social-science and other disciplines and has no proper theory of its own. If this is true, it is perhaps not surprising that the required 'integration' is so problematic, for social science knowledge is inherently framed according to conventions of the discipline rather than the requirements of a blueprint for social work action. A further twist to this problem is created by the fact that the social sciences are relatively immature, uncertain about a great many important areas of human life, and riven by some fundamental controversies.

The second difficulty is opposite to the first one. If we assume that social work intervention is, as a rule, carried out with the painstaking gathering of relevant information, with careful reflection, and as much thought to the likely consequences of various alternatives as circumstances reasonably permit, we are already speaking of a form of action which in a certain sense is theoretical as well as practical. We take it, in other words, that the practitioner uses something of what is known in general terms about the problem he is dealing with, and adds this to what he has learnt through his own experience of comparable situations to inform the way in which he responds to the specific case. He is not a robot programmed to respond in a stereotyped way to a predefined problem, but a creative intellect prepared where necessary to seek a unique solution to each problem. Indeed, the stereotyped response is universally condemned as a failure to 'individualise' the client. From this point of view it is doubtful that practice can ever proceed without theory, except perhaps where it has become mechanised to the point where its validity as social work is questionable anyway.

The third difficulty embraces the first two. It follows from the orthodox approach that theory and practice are to be understood as distinctive entities belonging to different logical categories. Theory comprises a set of related and testable propositions, while practice is what practitioners do. From this perspective it is hard to understand what integrating them might mean – logically, it would seem, they must remain obstinately separate. Integration seems therefore doomed to failure, although linking remains a possibility (which is explored below). On the other hand, if any valid social work practice is necessarily theoretical as well as practical, then the notion of integrating theory and practice becomes not impossible, but meaningless. This contrast of opposed impossibilities suggests a clue to the theory-practice conundrum. Incidentally, the very intractability of the problem may well be reflected in the results

of a fairly recent survey of former social work students' opinions of their courses. When asked to rate the five areas of fieldwork placement, social science teaching, social work practice teaching, social work literature/theory, and law in terms of which were most enjoyable, most useful and best taught, the respondents gave social work literature/theory the lowest- but-one rating on the first two counts and the lowest of all on the third (Davies, 1984).

Before leaving this critique of social work theory, it is appropriate to acknowledge the existence of dissenting voices. There are, broadly, two minority traditions. Their significance lies not in the extent to which they have won control of policy or practice, nor even in the strength and cogency of their arguments. It is rather that they illuminate the misfit of empirical theory with the common sense of practice, and sharpen awareness of the weakness of the official position. It is of some interest that, while the dominant ideology takes its orientation from empiricism, the critics can conveniently if loosely be associated with the remaining two of the 'three sociologies' (Benton, 1977): the humanist or interpretative tradition, and critical theory as an outgrowth of Marxism.

The humanist approach in social work gives pride of place to a recognition of the essentially personal character of the helping relationship. Whatever may be the goals of service agencies or the needs of clients, they are effected and negotiated through the medium of a direct personal relationship between helper and client. To be sure, this is not identical with friendship; it occurs within a conventionally defined system of expectations which set it apart from unofficial relationships. Nevertheless, it entails a direct and sometimes intuitive apperception of the other. At the very least it requires an act of imaginative identification with the experience of the other, and accords a centrality to subjective perception even if that means accepting the intrinsic validity of a view which might contradict 'objective' reality. Halmos (1965) has given a compelling account of the 'faith' of the counsellors in what is in effect a ministration of love, even when they purport to adhere to a deterministic reading of psychoanalysis. Wilkes (1981) has strongly attacked the scientism which she sees as pervading helping relationships, while Ragg (1977) has similarly denounced the reduction of unique persons to mere examples of cases of need. England (1986) proposes that the 'intuitive use of self' is central to practice, and likens it to art - as opposed to science.

These writers have a point, but they do not really enlighten how social work is, or ought to be, practised. By insisting on the uniqueness of cases, the individuality of the

relationship, and the intuitive character of the encounter, they render practice nearly ineffable, and thus place it beyond the reach of disciplined analysis. The aims, methods and outcomes are all obscured by a veil of individual experience which, though indubitable to the participants, is by definition at least partly inaccessible to others. It is not however necessary to deny the uniqueness of individual persons and situations in order to accept that there are important things in common between them.

The second minority tradition, known as radical social work, owes at least superficially a debt to Marxism. I do not think however that this school amounts to more than a somewhat socialist orientation within what is essentially a conventional interpretation of the nature of social work. If radical social work is not a failed or impossible project, it has yet to show convincing evidence that it amounts to anything that could be truly called radical (Clark with Asquith, 1985). In particular, the approach to knowledge (though not all the content deemed relevant) is practically indistinguishable from mainstream social work; thus it misses the point of critical theory.

2.3 Knowledge, theory and explanation

What does our knowledge of the world consist of? And how can we assess its validity? These ancient questions can never lose their point, since the foundations of any one position are apt to become more vulnerable as its adherents become more confident; and conversely, when certitude is lost, a sense of engagement with the fundamental issues returns. Kuhn (1970) has given a famous account of these processes. In this relatively brief treatment of a large and complex topic my aim is limited to establishing the concepts indispensable to an intelligible argument on the relationship of theory and practice. The outline I shall put forward follows much of the literature in this field in being shaped in reaction to the legacy of empiricism. We have already seen its influence in social work theory, but there is more to its importance than that. As Bernstein (1979, p.xxii) comments,

Contemporary thinkers in the Anglo-Saxon world cannot underestimate the extent to which their thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and even feelings have been shaped by empiricist, scientific and pragmatic traditions - even when one is reacting against them.

The atoms of knowledge are individuals' observations of the world. Observations need no extrinsic justification; in an important sense they are infallible or unarguable reports of experience, although they may be shown to be mistaken in comparison with subsequent observations. Classical empiricism holds that sense-data are the only valid basis of knowledge. It seems to me that this claim, though probably irrefutable, is, as has been widely argued, oversimplified and misleading. We do not merely perceive the world by our senses, but through an acquired complex of experience, understanding and association. Human beings (and perhaps some other creatures) have a mind which determines what they are capable of perceiving, as well as what and how they report as their perception. One's perception of the influence of, say, heat on a metal bar is therefore not an adequate analogy for, say, the perception of the influence of warmth on a human skin; but empiricism does not adequately recognise the difference.

Repeated similar, concordant or reinforcing observations, whether one's own or those experienced vicariously through the reports of others, coalesce into facts, or more precisely, factual statements. A factual statement is the distillation of a series of observations, and purports that its veracity is not in doubt (whereas a single observation is, by comparison, much more open to doubt as to its accuracy as a representation of the phenomenon that others might see). We say, for example, 'this bird is a robin'. Now while such a statement may perfectly well be precipitated by a single observation,

it is impossible without a (usually) large number of antecedent observations. The antecedent observations are indispensable to both the establishing of the (shared) concept of a robin, and to the formation of the individual's mental constructs which enable a meaningful perception, or apperception, to occur. Knowledge, such as the concept of a robin, is inescapably a social product, and concepts are always necessarily located in a specific cultural milieu (one might say form of life) and designed to appeal to it. Similarly, the individual's potentiality to appreciate and share a particular concept is only formed by the process of social interaction.

As observations coalesce into facts, so facts coalesce into empirical regularities. The discovery and formulation of an empirical regularity makes it possible to subsume a large number of factual statements into a small number of generalising or summarising statements. From extensive collections of facts about the behaviour of robins, we can conclude that 'robins defend a territory'. A powerful empirical regularity will enable one to subsume an indefinitely large set of facts and observations. However, the distinction between facts and empirical regularities is relative, not absolute; an empirical regularity in one context may properly be adopted as a fact in another.

An empirical regularity summarises a large number of antecedent facts and observations. It is a short, but hazardous, step from the statement of an empirical regularity to the presumption that all relevantly similar future cases will exhibit the same regularities. The question is whether, having established to our satisfaction that one particular population of robins behaves in a territorial manner, we are safe in assuming that all robins behave this way. This leads then to the debate about the differences between accidental generalisations and scientific laws.

In his exposition of the mainstream position Ryan (1970) argues that we must distinguish between 'enumerative' and 'nomothetic' generalisations. An enumerative generalisation can be shown to be true merely by exhaustive enumeration, i.e. by considering every case to which it is supposed to apply. It will not 'license' counterfactual statements, 'that is hypothetical statements about what would have been the case had some non-actual possibility been realised'. Benton (1977) explains the issue similarly, saying that a 'nomological' law 'licenses prediction of some event not included as evidence for it'.

It seems to me that the issue turns on how one decides whether a particular generalisation 'licenses' a certain prediction. Presumably a prediction is 'licensed' if and

only if the observation or event it anticipates belongs to the same class of events as those which led to the formulation of the law. This is based in turn on the presumption that the behaviour of the universe is ordered and self consistent. We have therefore to decide how to classify the phenomenon in question before we can decide whether a law is applicable.

I do not think it is possible always to be certain about whether a given empirical generalisation or putative law should count as a law or not. An empirical generalisation or putative law may hold good for a large universe of observations, both actual and anticipated. It may thus pass the test of 'enabling counterfactual conditionals' (Benton, 1977), or in other words one can use it to devise a hypothetical statement of what would not be expected to happen. If we then test the putative law on new events within the classes of events defined and identified as relevant, and if we find that the predictions do not hold good, we may then only be able to conclude that the law or empirical generalisation has a limited range, and be left undecided about whether or not it was a conceptually unsound law in the first place. In other words, the validity of laws and empirical regularities is entirely contingent on systems of classification. Now systems of classification neither merely precede nor merely succeed the making of observations, but develop in parallel with the collection of data. Theory and data can only be meaningful in a dialectical relationship with each other. Laws, generalisations and systems of classification are intertwined in their development. Yesterday's law may be demoted to today's empirical generalisation applicable over a reduced set of circumstances, and conversely today's working generalisation may be the precursor of tomorrow's law.

We have now arrived at a position partially in sympathy with Popper's critical rationalism. As Miller (1983) summarises it, '... knowledge evolves through a series of conjectures and refutations . . . if a conjecture weathers all the objections we can raise against it, then there is no reason to suppose that it is not right'. We cannot therefore suppose that it is right; only that so far it has not been shown to be wrong. So it is with laws and generalisations; at any moment we can only say of one that it has held up so far.

Implicit in the position I have developed is a rejection of the classical hypothetico-deductive model of scientific explanation. According to this, 'explanations require the adducing of general laws . . . from which, in conjunction with statements of initial conditions, we can deductively infer statements about empirical consequences' (Ryan,

1970, p.46). The hypothetico-deductive model is incompatible with the conception of laws as no more than (relatively robust) empirical regularities since, on that basis, an explanation collapses into the tautology of saying that something happened that way because that's the way such things always happen. If, as I have argued, we cannot rely upon laws as anything more than relatively well-attested empirical generalisations, we must abandon any model of explanation which sees it as resting on deduction from laws. I also think that the classical view is mistaken in supposing that a law is a statement of invariance derivable from a theory (Bernstein, 1979). Laws, as I have already implied, are inductively generated from observations, and are always provisional, as Popper argues (though Popper would reject the validity of the inductive process).

Having rejected much of the empiricist framework in general and the hypothetico-deductive model of explanation in particular, it is necessary now to enquire what we should put in its place. It might be advisable at this point to restate the caveats about what 'theory' means, or rather recall the diversity of its meaning. Sayer (1984) identifies three senses of the term in social science: as an ordering framework; as conceptualisation; or as a synonym for 'hypothesis' or 'explanation'. Ryan (1970), taking up the topic of models and theories, starts with the disclaimer that 'nothing whatever turns on the verbal usage which I adopt here and someone else might reject'. Such open-mindedness is refreshing, but a little deceptive: sooner or later a position must be taken up, for the sake of clarity if for no other reason.

Ryan (1970) states that what we require of an explanation is an argument to the effect that 'the event in question was what we should rationally expect'; and a corollary of this would be that a satisfactory explanation excludes the possibility of different outcomes from the same set of initial circumstances. Ideally at least, an explanation should show why a certain outcome necessarily follows from certain conditions; but as we shall see, we often have to be content with an explanation less than rigorous by this criterion.

There are, I shall argue, at least two different kinds of explanation, which I shall refer to as conformity and causal explanations respectively.

In a conformity explanation we associate the event in question with a phenomenon or phenomena whose behaviour is known; we say that it is an instance of a recognised phenomenon. A conformity explanation is in essence an appeal to the knowledge of an

accepted empirical regularity, and it is thus also an exercise in classification. Now, a very large number of everyday explanations are of this kind. We might explain to a child that the water has turned to ice because the temperature is below freezing, and water always behaves like this. We might explain someone's depression by reference to their recent bereavement, saying in effect that this is what often happens in such circumstances. Conformity explanations are of great practical value in that they enable one to deal with the confusing welter of experience by codifying it to a more manageable set of generalisations. However, a conformity explanation does not tell us why something happened. That is the task of a causal explanation.

A causal explanation or, in Ryan's (1970) apt phrase, a causal narrative, goes beyond mere association of an event with a category (or categories) of like events; it aims to show how an event was a necessary, or at least probable, outcome of the preconditions. To do so it must trace an argument from the data through to the best available laws or empirical generalisations. The path of such an argument is given by the theory adopted to explain the event; the task of theory is to provide the means of answering 'why' questions. Ryan (1970, p.29) suggests that the role of theories is the improvement of causal narratives. The process of moving from the data to the best available laws goes beyond the association with obviously like events which typifies a conformity explanation; it entails discovering the links with other phenomena which may at first sight appear unrelated or even contradictory to the event in question. Clearly, powerful theories will encompass a wide range of phenomena, and will make sense of what would otherwise seem inexplicable.

I am suggesting that theory, in the more precise and delimited sense I wish to defend in this thesis and in contrast to the loose usages of the social work literature, is of at least two kinds. In the first place, it may comprise a body of knowledge represented by the distillation of a (usually large) number of observations into an empirical generalisation, or generalisations. It describes phenomena systematically and economically, and provides the material for conformity explanations in which the events in question are associated with the relevant class of phenomena. In the second place, theory may offer a general form of argument for relating certain phenomena to a given set of laws or empirical generalisations; in this case a causal explanation represents the application of such an argument to a particular situation. A strong theory yields an indefinite series of similar explanations.

How then is theory arrived at? We can only ever have a finite number of cases from which to generate theory. Popper's treatment of this issue is to say in effect that the generation of theory is not problematic, and what matters is whether it is in principle falsifiable. Now I do not think this can be an adequate account of the process of theory generation, as it seems to deal with only half the business. Theories do not fall out of the sky into abstract intelligences waiting to nurture and test them. Theory, like all human activity, is the product of minds formed by a process of socialisation; and the testing of theory is also essentially a social process. A theory held in the mind of one person and never exhibited for scrutiny and appraisal would hardly count as a theory at all, because the explanations it generated would be unintelligible.

I wish to argue that theory building takes place by a process of induction and analogy. I have implied that the outcome of the, so to speak, primitive activity of explanation is the conformity explanation. We say, in effect, that the event to be explained is similar or identical in the relevant respects to acknowledged classes of events with known properties, where the question of 'relevance' hinges on classification. It is then a short step to making an inductive inference that future relevantly similar events will exhibit the same properties. Of course such an expectation is always open to refutation; but the more occurrences that an inductive inference correctly anticipates, the better will its credibility be. With the accumulation of evidence, support for an inductive inference will gather or decline as the case may be. This process eventuates in the identification of robust empirical generalisations and laws, or the demise of failed laws and hypotheses.

There is more however to theory-building than this somewhat revisionist Popperian account would imply. Humans have an irresistible urge to classify or associate strange phenomena with the known and familiar; this is how they make the world comprehensible and tolerable, or apparently so. Through the process of conformity explanation, we can make at least some kind of sense out of experience. However, the process of association frequently over-runs to include phenomena which are not similar in the relevant respects; we 'jump to conclusions', sometimes the wrong way. Not only does this lead to defective explanations, it also blocks the appreciation of what may, from a less committed view, be obvious facts. The history of science is full of theories which outlived the evidence for or against them because of preconceptions, later shown to be misguided, about the relevance of data.

The process of inductive inference is not limited to the development of expectations

about the behaviour of cases that are relevantly similar in strictly empirical terms. Theory is also developed by the inference of models or analogies from one universe of observations, and their transfer to another. Such a process of abstraction may be implicit or explicit. It is difficult to overestimate the influence of analogies and metatheoretical frameworks; there can be no doubt that they radically condition what we see and how we are able to interpret it. Well known examples include the animism of primitive cultures; the notion that the universe was explicable in terms of particles obeying the laws of Newtonian mechanics; the influence of Darwinism far beyond the sphere of biology; and the contemporary impact of the development of artificial intelligence on the understanding of human reasoning.

We may now draw certain inferences about the characteristics of a satisfactory - or perhaps satisfying - explanation. (i) An explanation is always and intrinsically an appeal to the experience of the other. An explanation can only make sense where it calls upon the other's knowledge, and the sediment of that knowledge in the form of the facts, empirical generalisations and theoretical frameworks the other possesses; if it fails to do that it may not be 'wrong' from the point of view of a general audience, but it will be unintelligible to the person who requires the explanation. An unintelligible explanation is no explanation at all.

(ii) Someone who receives an explanation will constantly test it for congruence with his own experience. If it accords with his experience, he will be inclined to accept it; and if it enlarges his understanding, he will find it persuasive. In other words, he will test an explanation for plausibility by comparison with his own knowledge and experience. On the other hand, an explanation which generates counter-intuitive expectations, or which seems to fly in the face of common sense, will be vigorously resisted. Of course such explanations often have to be accepted in the end in the face of overwhelming evidence. All this means that ultimately an explanation cannot be pronounced right or wrong, but only more or less plausible. The advance of science often consists of moving the boundaries of plausibility by means of tireless argument. What is being emphasised again here is the fundamentally social character of scientific enterprise; it is institutionalised in the conventions of scholarship, presentation of empirical evidence, peer review, and so on.

(iii) An economical, neat or elegant explanation is generally preferred to a complicated or messy one. The assumption behind this is difficult to either support or refute, but is presumably based on the experience that the most far-reaching and persuasive theories

TABLE 2.1

Exploratory typology of knowledge

One could sensibly speak of a person having knowledge in any of the following senses:-

- | | | |
|---------------|---|---|
| OBSERVATIONAL | { | 1. Of individual objects, places, persons; e.g. 'this is John'. (Observation) |
| | { | 2. Of a specific event; e.g. 'John went to school today'. (Fact) |
| | { | 3. Of a regular or repeated occurrence; e.g. 'John usually misses school on Mondays'. (Fact) |
| CONTEXTUAL | { | 4. Of a social situation or state of affairs; e.g. 'John's family comprises his mother A, his father B, his sister C; they reside at P'. |
| | { | 5. Of a specific context: the local 'landscape', literally or figuratively. A constellation of information under the preceding headings. |
| ABSTRACT | { | 6. Of a procedure, model, method or algorithm. |
| | { | 7. Of a body of social practice; social structures; cultural and social norms; language; work of art; history; opinion and belief. |
| THEORETICAL | { | 8. Of a system of classification, body of research, empirical generalisations and scientific laws; e.g. 'truancy is often associated with lack of parental control'. This knowledge enables systematic and economical description and makes possible conformity explns. |
| | { | 9. Of the form of argument pertaining to a category of like causal narratives, enabling causal explanations. |
| | { | 10. Of a general theoretical framework or explanatory paradigm; e.g. relativity, Marxism, sociobiology, psychoanalysis. An academic discipline. |

encompass a wide range of phenomena within a limited range of general propositions.

(iv) A satisfactory explanation must obviously be formally self-consistent and logically sound. However, the requirements of logic are sometimes attended by controversy, especially when different metaphysical systems are involved in the issue.

The arguments of this section may now be summarised in the form of an exploratory typology of knowledge. In presenting this, it is again necessary to restate the cautions made earlier about the variable and imprecise terminology which besets this area of discussion. I do not wish therefore to claim any special merit or exactitude for the terms I shall adopt; and I shall be satisfied if the main trends and distinctions are discernible. The typology is outlined in Table 2.1.

When, in ordinary speech, we say that someone 'knows' a thing, we commonly distinguish between 'knowing-that' and 'knowing-how'. The former suggests something like a quiet awareness, whereas the latter implies that the actor possesses a practical ability to carry out some task; and in the process he presumably utilises some of what he knows-that. The typology presented here is concerned with knowledge in the sense of knowing-that; it comprises ten types of such knowledge, divided into four levels. The process of application of knowledge connoted in 'know-how' will be considered later.

The elementary forms of knowledge I shall refer to as observational knowledge; they comprise the facts of ordinary experience and for the most part, the awareness of them is taken for granted. Occasionally, as for example in legal and scientific work, we may take extraordinary care to verify observational knowledge. Observational knowledge is covered by types 1 to 3 in the typology - for convenience, K1 to K3.

The second level of the typology, K4 to K5, covers contextual knowledge. Contextual knowledge comprises extensive and well ordered sets of observational knowledge; it includes not only the mere facts, but is implicitly built on a sophisticated framework which enables the actor to recall, manipulate and add to such knowledge virtually indefinitely. Thus it is incomparably easier to recall knowledge which has meaning within a context than it is mere aggregations of disconnected facts.

The third level, K6 to K7, covers abstract knowledge. At this point we move from the concrete to the symbolic, and identify the higher cognitive faculties which make

possible culture and civilisation. The concept of a model (K6) is discussed further in Chapter 3. The content covered by K7 includes the enormous knowledge implicit in everyday social action.

The fourth level, K8 to K10, covers theoretical knowledge. Within this are included those bodies of knowledge which make possible conformity (K8) and causal (K9) explanations, previously argued and defined as theory in a strict sense. To these must be added general theoretical frameworks, or meta-theory.

This typology, like all such devices, is inevitably a simplification of a complex problem. In particular it must be remembered that the different types of knowledge cannot be considered independent, but necessarily interact with each other. For example, knowledge of a context (K5) may sometimes be formed upon a template of abstract knowledge (K7), but the very ability to acquire abstract knowledge has to succeed the acquisition of a particular contextual knowledge. It is only by learning, say, an alphabet that we can grasp the general concept - and come to conceive of the possibility of other alphabets. There is always a dialectical relationship between observations and systems of classification, facts and theories, generalities and particularities.

It is instructive finally to classify the forms of social work 'theory' identified earlier from the literature, according to the typology presented here. The first of these was theory borrowed from the social sciences and is evidently largely drawn from K8 and K9, the material which enables conformity and causal explanations. The 'grand' theory that some would argue is also part of social work's knowledge base clearly belongs to K10.

The second species known to social work is 'practice theory'. This is clearly abstract knowledge (K6 to K7) but, as is widely argued, falls short of the criteria for theory proper. I have argued the view that 'practice theory' and its relatives do not lead to explanation, and should therefore not be called 'theory' in the strict sense.

Thirdly, the social work literature entertains the possibility and discusses the substance of 'theories of social work'. Here we are plainly in the sphere of K10, while recognising that social work is still at a very early stage of development as a discipline.

2.4 The content of theory and the referent of explanation

It is time now to turn to the content of theory and with it, some distinctions which turn on the referent of theory. As previously implied, in the usage adopted here a theory is a 'recipe' (Ryan, 1970) for generating explanations addressed to the identified phenomena. The form of a satisfactory explanation turns, *inter alia*, on the kind of problem it is addressed to. As the critical chorus on empiricism has shown, whatever may be the merits of empiricism as an approach to understanding the natural world, it fails both as a description of and as a programme for a science of social life. First, it is instructive to consider some differences between the objects of different fields of scientific study.

The physical sciences are concerned with inanimate matter and physical energy. They aim to build theory applicable to the most basic elements of the physical universe. Now it is characteristic of natural science to define its concerns in such a way that amongst the objects of its observation and inquiry, all examples of a given phenomenon are identical in the relevant respects. This is in the nature of a philosophical presupposition rather than an empirical statement. For example, one assumes that all atoms of a particular isotope of carbon having similar energies will behave in same way under a given set of circumstance. No differences would arise if one such atom was substituted for another; their properties are identical, or at any rate indistinguishable. Unusual or unique occurrences are approached on the assumption that despite their singularity, the path to understanding them lies in discovering how the accepted laws applicable to all matter and energy have in this particular case led to an unusual concatenation of observations or events.

The biological sciences approach things somewhat differently. The objects of their concern do indeed display fundamental regularities, but these regularities are not such as to lead to satisfactory explanations of many important phenomena. In particular the differences between physical systems amenable to study by, say, the disciplines of physics or chemistry, and living systems, have been attributed to the contrasting properties of closed and open systems respectively. Open systems, according to the principles of general system theory (von Bertalanffy, 1973) exhibit characteristics which cannot be satisfactorily accounted for by their physical or chemical properties alone. Sayer (1984) is one author who insists on what amounts to an epistemological discontinuity between closed and open systems.

The social sciences have still other issues to contend with. Not only do humans have all the characteristics of the foregoing classes, but they also have such scientifically troublesome attributes as self consciousness, intentionality, and the capacity for agency, language, morality, politics, artistic expression and so forth. Neither physical science nor the theory of open systems alone can adequately account for these attributes.

I do not wish to argue specifically for a three-layered theory of knowledge, but rather to illustrate the claim that the disciplines of one area of inquiry are not so much right or wrong when applied to another field, as irrelevant. While it is undeniable that human beings do have, for example, a physical and chemical constitution, it is, I suggest, a straightforward error to assume that physics and chemistry will necessarily be able to tell us the whole story. Some such assumption underlies the now largely abandoned positivist approach to the understanding of human life. Hughes' (1980, p.66) account of Dilthey's position summarises the argument nicely: '... the positivist methodology of the natural sciences is inadequate to the understanding of human phenomena except in their aspect as natural objects'. In other words, those who would expect the methodology of, say, the physical and biological sciences alone to lead to a satisfactory account of social life are making an a priori assumption which, while perhaps understandable in the context of the historical ascendance of the physical sciences, is unjustified by the consequent experiences, and which serves as a poor guide for the development of knowledge of social life.

It may be objected that nobody nowadays subscribes to the naive empiricism I have alluded to. While the point is fair, I suggest that the reductionism which supposes that social phenomena are in principle reducible to the operation of well defined laws analogous to those of the physical sciences is still prevalent and, as I shall now argue, mistaken. It affects both the philosophy and content of social science, and the business of applying social science to practical endeavours. To appreciate one fundamental reason why reductionism is unjustifiable we need to return to the distinctions between the objects of natural and social science. This turns on the question of sameness and difference between the objects of a universe of enquiry.

It was suggested earlier that the objects of enquiry in natural science are assumed to have an essential similarity; natural phenomena in all their diversity are taken to be manifestations of a relatively limited set of universally applicable laws. In biological sciences this is also true, but there is more recognition of the possibility and significance of uniqueness. For example, in many species each individual has a unique

genetic complement, and it is of both theoretical and practical importance to understand how this will differentiate its anatomy, physiology, behaviour and so on from other members of its species. The point here may be expressed by saying that while in some respects all cows may be similar, in other respects all cows are different. According to the theoretical ends in view, the understanding of the differences may be just as important as the understanding of the similarities. Now, the same argument applies a fortiore to the science of human life. We wish to understand the commonalities; we might say that important progress in this direction has been made by, for example, the 'hard' or 'experimental' schools of psychology. Equally, we sometimes wish to understand the differences between individuals, cultures, etc., and in such an enquiry we must have a grasp of the uniquenesses. In that respect we might instance the disciplines of clinical psychoanalysis or ethnomethodology. Rickert similarly distinguished between nomothetic and ideographic representations of reality (Hughes, 1980, P.68).

With this distinction in mind it is possible to shed some light on the issues of probabilistic laws or explanations, and the relation of nomothetic explanations and ideographic accounts. It has been widely conceded that even on the relatively rare occasions when social science can muster some laws, they are usually of a probabilistic and therefore supposedly weaker sort than the proper laws of empirical science. This however represents a distortion of the goals of different enquiries. In social science we are in general concerned with universes of study whose members are neither all identical in the relevant respects, nor all unique in them. It is therefore only to be expected that any laws are likely to be probabilistic in character, and that is not necessarily a deficiency. Nomothetic explanations can only have a limited range in social science, as nomothetic explanations do not exhaust the understanding which we seek. It follows too that an ideographic explanation - an account of one case in all its uniqueness - is on occasion a proper and necessary project. An ideographic explanation does not seek to subsume the phenomenon into a category of like phenomena, but to do precisely the opposite - to differentiate it, and account for the differences. Most crucially perhaps, this applies to persons; thus is a corridor opened from the study of behaviour to the study of human action.

2.5 Theory, prediction and prescription

The cardinal test of a theory is whether it enables us to anticipate events correctly; if it does not, it is at least under threat of falsification. As Sayer (1984, p.66) argues, this is not quite the same as 'truth'; he proposes that the concept of 'truth' should be replaced with that of 'practical adequacy': 'To be practically adequate, knowledge must generate expectations about the world and about the results of our actions which are actually realised'. Under the influence of empiricism, it is traditionally held that a theory based on causal laws provides the route to accurate prediction. However, this is not a sufficient account. In social science and in everyday life, we very often make use of empirical regularities in order to anticipate events; these regularities are often the only guide. We make the presumption that relevantly similar past events will probably tell us, by a process of inductive inference, how future occasions will turn out. And when, by utilising an empirical regularity, we make a serviceable prediction, we explain it by means of a conformity explanation. A prediction founded on more substantial grounds is, correspondingly, the vindication of a causal explanation; but frequently, causal explanations are not available. In those circumstances we may have to be content with the appeal to empirical regularities.

An important issue turns on whether a theory can be said to prescribe how one ought to act. There are at least three paradigms which tend to equate theory with prescription. Within the empiricist tradition it is a short step from spelling out a theory with its reference to 'causal' laws, to the argument that we should therefore follow the theory in order to achieve certain ends. We say in effect that in order to erect a satisfactory building, one must follow the stipulations of Newtonian mechanics, materials science, and so on. There is a corollary to the effect that only if we build in accordance with the relevant theories will we achieve satisfactory results (except by pure luck). The essential argument goes something like this: well defined and validated causal laws enable us to make accurate predictions; to achieve certain identified ends, one must therefore apply such predictions to the proposed means of attainment of the ends; thus laws prescribe actions.

A very different linkage of explanation and prescription is derived by Marxism and critical theory. In Marxism the whole point of theory is to create the understanding essential to practical action; theory which fails to do that is simply not adequate as theory. The distinction between 'is' and 'ought' is very much blurred. Habermas has developed this tradition into a radical reformulation of the whole problem (McCarthy,

1984).

A third sense in which theory can be said to prescribe is when it refers to moral theory. One could say for example that the moral theory of respect for persons prescribes that they should not be harmed where it can reasonably be avoided. But this is a semantic point, depending on a usage of 'theory' much more inclusive than the one I am advancing.

To these observations may be added the more pragmatic possibility that theory is inherently linked to prescription because it is the practical need for accurate prediction which both drives the process of theory building, and tests it by successful or failed prediction.

In this thesis I adopt a narrower conception of theory. As already indicated, I take the strict view that a theory consists in or is represented by the general form of explanation of a number of cognate events or phenomena. I have argued that the substance of an explanation may comprise the appeal to laws or empirical generalisations, or the understanding of the unique aspects of a single case. For the present purposes the central point in this conception is that there need be no necessary connection of theory and action. I take it that it is practically and logically possible (and not at all uncommon in actuality) for one to hold a theory and not consistently attempt to apply, or even believe in, its potential consequences for action. Similarly, theory may be pursued 'for its own sake', as an artistic or intellectual activity with no apparent necessary relevance for any identified practical problem.

It is inherent in this conception of theory that it must be capable of clear explication. Now it is possible that someone might regularly give explanations of relevantly similar cases in a consistent form which thereby implicitly invokes a theory, without himself being able to give an account of the theory in an abstract form. However, the theory in its abstract form must always be discernible to at least one observer if it is ever to be identified as a theory, and the explanations be understood as other than an accidental series of similarities.

To build theory means firstly to devise systematic descriptions of bodies of facts, and secondly to explain them persuasively and economically. It entails a process of active contemplation in pursuit of understanding, without necessarily espousing any other practical ambition. As already argued, this process is entirely contingent on the systems

of classification and analysis adopted. Observation is, as Sayer (1984) among many others argues, theory laden, but need not be theory bound.

2.6 Theory and practice in social intervention

It is time now to return to the question of how theory is applied in, or to, practice. Earlier I identified the orthodox position in social work as postulating two main levels or types of substantive theory, namely direct borrowings from social science, and a rather ill-defined category of 'practice theory'. To this might be added the third level of theory about the nature of social work. I argued that traditional notions of the relationship of theory and practice in social work are incoherent and offer but a poorly substantiated and unconvincing account of what actually happens in the process of applying theory to practice. To address these issues, I have advocated a stricter definition of theory than merely any collection of knowledge and values. In the next chapter I shall put forward an alternative conception based on this critique. First however it will be worth examining the work of a number of authors whose analysis of how theory relates to practice makes an informative contrast to the formulations criticised above, and which suggests some of the elements which might be needed in an improved theory.

Argyris and Schön (1977) propose that practitioners are guided by theories of action. We should take note that their usage of 'theory' is a particularly broad and inclusive one: 'a theory is . . . only a set of interconnected propositions that have the same referent Theories are vehicles for explanation, prediction or control' (ibid., pp.4-5). A theory of action takes the form: 'in situation S if you want to achieve consequence C, under assumptions a_1 . . . a_n , do A' (ibid., p.6). Furthermore, 'we explain or predict a person's deliberate behaviour by attributing theories of action to him'. Now, this conception is not much different from the notion of 'practice theory' which I have previously criticised. It is also doubtful that the idea that we explain a person's behaviour by attributing theories of action to him is anything more than an empty circular argument, for it is tantamount to the methodological direction that we should explain the behaviour by reference to the theory of action, while the only reliable means of discovering the theory of action is to study the behaviour. As the authors explain, 'we cannot learn what someone's theory-in-use is simply by asking him. We must construct his theories-in-use from observations of his behaviour' (ibid., p.7).

Of greater interest is Argyris and Schön's distinction between espoused theories and theories-in-use. The former 'are used to describe and justify behavior' (ibid., p.viii), but the latter are the operational ones the practitioner actually uses.

When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives his allegiance However, the theory that actually governs his actions is his theory-in-use, which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory; furthermore, the individual may or may not be aware of the incompatibility of the two theories. (Ibid., pp.6-7.)

The authors go on to describe an empirical study of practitioners' theories (in their sense of the term). They argue that resistance to constructive change is attributable to certain dysfunctional qualities of prevalent theories-in-use.

Argyris and Schön's study substantiates with empirical evidence the belief that there is often a big difference between what practitioners do and what they claim as its rationale, thus echoing the suspicions of many social work writers. On the other hand they remain bound to a remarkably mechanistic conception of theory. 'Theories-in-use may be regarded as a program for action designed to keep the values of certain variables within acceptable ranges. It is analogous to a computer program for an industrial process that is designed to keep conditions such as temperature and pressure within acceptable limits' (ibid., p.22). It is not credible that such a thoroughly cybernetic model could be adequate to explain the action of practitioners who self-evidently have values, emotions and ordinary human frailties as well as intellects.

In a later work Schön (1983) begins with a particularly clear critique of the conventional conceptions of professional knowledge, and their link with positivism. Schön argues that the dominant epistemology of practice is what he calls 'Technical Rationality', in which professional practice requires the mastery of a 'knowledge base' (ibid., p.24) of specialised scientific knowledge. Research and practice are institutionally separated, and in professional education the curriculum usually starts with basic science and is followed later by practicum or clinical work. What is more,

The prestige and apparent success of the medical and engineering models exerted a great attraction for the social sciences. In such fields as education, social work, planning, and policy making, social scientists attempted to do research, to apply it, and to educate practitioners, all according to their perceptions of the models of medicine and engineering. (Ibid., pp.38-39.)

Schön takes the view that 'Technical Rationality is the heritage of Positivism' (ibid.,

p.51) and that it is inadequate in various ways as an account of the application of knowledge in practice. Technical Rationality focuses on problem solving, disregarding the fact that in real practice the practitioner must first convert a problematic situation into a (solvable) problem. 'Technical Rationality depends on agreement about ends ... when ends are confused and confusing, there is as yet no "problem" to solve' (ibid., p.41).

Schön proceeds to replace the defective theory of Technical Rationality with a conception of the way knowledge is used in practice comprising two principal components, which he names knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action. The concept of knowing-in-action draws on an understanding of practical competence which has roots in phenomenology and in Ryle's (1973) rebuttal of Cartesian dualism as a theory of action. Schön's formulation is sufficiently important to merit quotation at length. Knowing-in-action, 'the characteristic mode of ordinary practical knowledge', has the following properties:

- There are actions, recognitions and judgments which we know how to carry out spontaneously; we do not have to think about them prior to or during their performance.
- We are often unaware of having learned to do these things; we simply find ourselves doing them.
- In some cases, we were once aware of the understandings which were subsequently internalized in our feeling for the stuff of action. In other cases, however, we may never have been aware of them. In both cases, however, we are usually unable to describe the knowing which our action reveals.

(Ibid., p.54.)

The second element is reflection-in-action, which we can, following Schön, liken to 'thinking on one's feet' or to improvisation in jazz. 'The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique' (ibid., p.54). In approaching a practice problem as a unique case, he 'responds to the complexity ... in what seems like a simple, spontaneous way (ibid., p.130). The practitioner engages in a 'reflective conversation' with a unique and uncertain situation; there is a spiralling process of appreciation, action and reappraisal (ibid., p.132).

Harrison (1987) based an empirical study of how social workers link theory and action on Schön's work. He suggested that there were three categories of reflection, which

function hierarchically. Routine situations are dealt with by comparison and classification, 'in which the definition of a problem and its assessment are derived by a method of comparison with what is known or familiar' (ibid., p.396). Secondly, unusual or difficult situations are seen in the light of general theoretical perspectives; in the case of Harrison's sample, this involved ideas from unitary methods and community social work. Thirdly, an approach labelled 'heuristic searching' is used to tackle the unknown, where conventional approaches seemed to have failed. 'Heuristic searching is usually implemented after comparison and the use of generic theories have already been considered' (ibid., p.399).

Kronman (1986) describes an approach to practical knowledge derived from the case-based tradition of legal education. He writes (ibid., p.205):

The work of lawyers, then, is case centred; in whatever capacity they function, whether as judges, counselors or draftsmen, lawyers are chiefly concerned to solve or avoid specific problems, and it is these that fix the beginning and end points of their reflections. This, of course, is a property not only of law practice but of every practical activity, a property which the term 'practical' itself denotes.

Kronman proposes that lawyers do not only require a general theoretical knowledge of the law, but the skill of bringing it to bear effectively on specific cases. This quality can be called 'practical wisdom' or 'sound judgement', and should be distinguished from dialectical ability or skill in analysis and argument.

The person of practical wisdom is not a Buddhist sage, working to clear his mind of all the interferences and obstacles created by its reflective apparatus, so that he may see all the world directly, unmediated by the illusions of his own thought. Quite the contrary, the judgements at which a practically wise man arrives are thought out; they are the products, that is to say, of a reflective examination which employs ideas or general concepts. (Ibid., p.210, emphasis original.)

Kronman goes on to argue that the particular quality which the practically wise man possesses to link general principles and concrete cases can be called imagination. It is neither sheer dialectical skill nor blind insight, but combines thinking and looking. It requires a sympathy or imaginative appreciation of another's point of view, but the sympathy is neither uncritical nor complete.

Kronman's approach, then, based on the craft of legal practice, suggests a much more plausible and fruitful way of understanding how practitioners in social work operate than the misunderstood borrowings from empiricism which inform much of the social work literature. It shares with Schön's analysis the frequent use of the metaphor of

'reflection' as the characteristic cognitive and imaginative process of informed practical action. It seems that what is entailed is not a linear process analogous to the certainties required by the hypothetico-deductive model of scientific explanation, but an iterative, cyclic or dialectic process in which external realities and internal 'knowing-in-action' are constantly compared and contrasted. In ordinary practical situations, both the data from the outside world and the necessary theoretical knowledge may be seriously incomplete. The process of reflection or imagination therefore may frequently never eventuate in certainty. Further, the exact process of reasoning may well be partly intuitive; it is transparent to its possessor, and often invisible to others. We shall see in due course that the evidence of this research tends substantially to support the conception of practical reasoning adumbrated here.

CHAPTER 3

Design and methodology

3.1 Statement of research question

In the previous chapter I put forward a critique of conceptions of theory prevalent in social work and elsewhere, and argued that the application of knowledge to practice is not equivalent to the simple transposition of scientific theories that the conventional view supposes. I have adopted a certain interpretation of theory and explanation with the intention that it shall be sufficiently clear what concepts inform this study. It is from these concerns that arise the questions to be addressed in this research.

Much time and energy is devoted to the formal academic instruction and certification of new entrants to social work and other professions, on the basis that they require to be equipped with 'theory' if they are to be competent in practice. But as we shall see, it seems that this 'theory' may after all be treated in practice as something of only rather marginal significance. The central aim of this research is to trace the form of the relationship between theory and practice characteristic of the sphere of social intervention. Such work typically entails an environment where there are many practically unknown and unquantifiable factors, where skills are only roughly defined, and where it is desired to bring about an improvement or alleviation of problems whose causation, impact and extent are at best only rather imperfectly comprehended. In short, the aim of this study is to describe and explain the form of practitioners' understanding of the uncertain and complex real world, and the relationship of this understanding to action.

In social work only limited attempts have been made to research the theory-practice relationship empirically. Although the literature abounds with exhortations on the need to relate theory to practice, there is a contrasting paucity of empirical research on the subject. Some ten years ago Carew (1979) claimed that there had been, at the most, one study between then and 1931. A handful of small studies has been published in the last few years, including those of Carew (1979), Barbour (1984), Waterhouse (1987)

and Harrison (1987). Stevenson and Parsloe's study (DHSS, 1978) contains pertinent material including the remarkable observation that in their sample of over 360 staff a social worker 'who spelt out the use of particular theories was unique in our study' (p. 331). In all these studies, practitioners were interviewed and asked, in essence, to explain the theory they used. One basic finding is consistent in all these studies: that practitioners by and large do not seem to use theory, at least not explicitly. The Stevenson and Parsloe study found that:

The general picture is that only a few of the possible methods [of working with individuals and families] were ever mentioned and social workers' descriptions of these often bore little resemblance to the methods as outlined in the textbooks. (DHSS, 1978, p. 339)

Carew (1979, p. 361) said of his study of local authority social workers that:

Few of the responses reflected the use of theory and research findings However, when the researcher finally suggested an author, a theory or a piece of research that might be related to what they had done, then the respondents would sometimes be able to link their activities to a theoretical framework.

Barbour (1984) offered a three-fold model of how theory-practice integration occurred, based on a study of 20 social work students. However, the model did not appear to discriminate reliably either between students or modes of action, and the conclusions were not adequately supported or explained by the findings presented in the published account.

Waterhouse (1987, pp. 13-14) found that amongst her sample of eleven recent ex-students

Most respondents said they used theory in their current practice, but failed, when citing examples of theory, to distinguish among research findings, factual information, concepts and values Half the respondents thought there was no relationship between theory and practice

It might be added that the conclusions of these studies are perfectly consonant with a prevalent folk wisdom that theory is not very important for practice.

These studies on the integration of theory and practice have generally been informed by the mainstream conception of theory and its relationship to practice discussed in the previous chapter. I have argued that this conception is defective in various ways, and the findings of the studies informed by it must therefore be interpreted with appropriate reservations. What the studies do demonstrate is that social workers are not good at articulating either the borrowings from social science, or the 'practice theory',

which allegedly constitute social work theory. This of course is the argument of Argyris and Schön (1977), who hold that we cannot learn someone's 'theory-in-use' simply by asking them.

A different picture emerges however if we consider research studies not explicitly aimed at the theory-practice problem as such, but rather having the aims of providing naturalistic, analytic or evaluative accounts of what social workers do. From some of these sources it can readily be shown that social workers do at least in some senses use theory, provided we admit that some looseness of definition is inevitable given the range of usages already referred to. The following examples illustrate some practitioners' conceptual frameworks that researchers have reported.

In his study of field social workers Rees (1978) adopts the notion of ideology as a central explanatory concept. Rees stipulates that

"Ideology" refers to interconnected sets of ideas which were incorporated in social workers' simplified and convenient interpretations of aspects of their occupation. (ibid., p. 42)

This wide interpretation of what is already a notoriously slippery concept has the advantage of embracing almost any of the practitioners' mental constructs which might be deemed relevant; and the disadvantage that it will not permit of a resolution of the many meanings which are pertinent to the present study. Nevertheless we may note that Rees found that social workers possessed a 'general ideology of helping' within which could be identified three 'practice-oriented ideologies'. The 'casework' ideology was 'an approach which emphasised some understanding of individual psychology and pathology'; this was seen as a 'method' of social work (ibid., p. 52). Casework was understood as

A social worker's art of trying to use his relationship with people whom he assumes to be under stress, in order to mobilize their capacities and resources in their environment to reduce or solve conditions leading to such stress. (ibid., p. 54)

The service ideology laid the emphasis on time limited practical help and was seen as relatively straightforward and non-problematic. Thirdly,

An ideology of relief conceptualises what actions social workers considered open to them once they regarded people as having difficulties related to the source and size of their income. (ibid., p. 57)

Now it will be apparent that these 'ideologies' contain (but do not differentiate between) theory in several of the senses previously debated. Rees's study shows, among

other things, that social workers do indeed possess and express in their practice at least the rudiments of theory.

In their comprehensive survey of social work research Rees and Wallace (1982) comment that consideration of social workers' evaluations of their practice 'was hampered by a lack of research material' (p. 88). From their study of the literature they nonetheless identify the existence of three broad views among social workers on the value of providing material or financial help. These were as follows (ibid., p.94):

1. some workers perceive little or no value in the provision of such tangible help.
2. other workers do provide such help, but with reservations. It is provided under certain conditions and is usually used as part of a general casework plan.
3. other workers give material aid as freely as possible with few reservations. They regard such provision as an integral part of social work and as necessary for satisfactory outcomes in particular cases.

Two social work activities seen as helpful by practitioners are 'caring' and 'talking'; but social workers are ambivalent about the value of advocacy and advice work. Here we may detect, albeit dimly, the existence of theoretical frameworks. Once again Rees and Wallace invoke the concept of ideology to give shape to the findings:

Ideological considerations determine the social workers' attitudes towards, for example, the usefulness of practical help, the appropriateness of counselling, the desirability of advocacy and negotiation . . . [they] also affect practitioners' perceptions of people they are most likely and able to help. (ibid., p. 104)

From the study of the research literature Rees and Wallace identify four broad outcome criteria as being used by practising social workers: (1) client change (2) bureaucratic obligations (3) social/moral control of the client (4) client satisfaction. They add:

This list is not exhaustive. No doubt other, perhaps more subtle criteria are utilised in practice. But until further research is carried out on just this issue, our knowledge remains limited (ibid., p. 109).

Hadley and McGrath (1984) present an empirical study of one area team in order to assess to what extent it had adopted a particular model. They offer a relatively full definition of community social work as conceived by the instigator of new working practices in the team and show that the team had in fact substantially adopted the organisational structure, values and ethos associated with this model.

Holder and Wardle (1981) carried out research on their own FSU team's practice and its evolution away from traditional conceptions of appropriate methods of social work

service delivery towards a 'unitary approach'. They manage to integrate, in a way which is still uncommon in the British literature, a semi-historical narrative with informed theoretical reflection about the direction of the work.

Further examples of studies which shed light more or less indirectly on the existence of a capacity of social workers to use theory might be offered, but an exhaustive catalogue is unnecessary to the point being made here. Although understanding the general relationship of theory and practice has not been specified as a target of many pieces of research, in the process of examining and evaluating practice it may well emerge incidentally (if we care to look for the evidence) that some social workers, at least, exhibit a well developed theoretical grasp of relevant knowledge and models for practice which they are able to translate into concrete service delivery. This conclusion contrasts with the negative findings reviewed above. It also reinforces an old suspicion that most social workers - along with people generally - are probably much more adept at demonstrating their knowledge and understanding through the medium of practical action than they are at rendering it into the abstract code of academic discussion. If this suspicion is true, it must add further gravity to one's reservations about any methodology for understanding the relationship of theory and practice which depends substantially upon the practitioner's ability to perform a task of intellectual abstraction which is not analogous to the actual process of theorising in practice.

The present research problem was therefore to devise a way of elucidating the theory-practice relationship which would not be doomed to the rather inconclusive or negative findings of the previous studies aimed directly at the issue. Underlying this was the belief, based on ordinary experience as well as the reading of accounts of practice, that practitioners probably do often use knowledge and theory in subtle and sophisticated ways which are simply not accessible if the researcher requires the practitioner to articulate his theory in the abstract. This is in sympathy with Schön's (1983) position, discussed in the previous chapter. It is indeed widely supposed that professional practice makes high demands of practitioners' knowledge and powers of reason; it therefore seems quite unsatisfactory to conclude that they possess little theory. I have argued that the failure of earlier research to give a satisfactory account of the theory-practice question must be attributed both to weaknesses in the understanding of what constitutes theory, and to consequent methodological weaknesses.

3.2 The action model: a dynamic hypothesis

It was decided to approach the theory-practice question sketched above by postulating an improved theory which would take account of the deficiencies of the conventional approach. Now since the aim of this study is to elucidate the relationship of thought and action, it clearly cannot be approached on the basis of a fixed idea about that relationship. On the other hand, some hypothesis is desirable at least for heuristic purposes, and as a step on the way to an improved theory.

It will be obvious from the general account of scientific enquiry in Chapter 2 that it is not the intention here simply to validate or invalidate a precast hypothesis, in positivist fashion. Rather, it is a matter of exploring a problem which itself is only rather tentatively stated. The problem, in other words, is that conventional ways of explaining the relevance and relationship of theory to practice rest upon a flawed understanding of theory, and moreover lead to an unconvincing account of practitioners' thought and action. The hypothesis would be fluid, developing continually in response to the continually emerging evidence, and at the same time directing the search for new evidence. For this reason I term it a dynamic hypothesis. The reflexive research process envisaged here is familiar from the literature on qualitative and ethnographic methodology. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p. 174) for example comment on how 'the analysis of data feeds into the process of research design'. Abrams (in Bulmer, 1986, p.45) goes so far as to say that

If one is interested in the whole of a relatively untheorised social phenomenon ... naive observation is often much to be preferred to the spuriously sophisticated testing of hypotheses within a curtailed framework of theory.

The actual content of this dynamic hypothesis is what I shall call the action model, in which are set out the various factors and relationships that would appear to be necessary to an explanation of the relationship of theory and practice. The action model will be described presently; first however it is necessary to explain more fully the idea of the model for practice, which constituted a central element of the action model in its original and speculative form.

3.2.1 Models for practice

In the review of concepts of 'theory' in social work it was shown that the conventional view favours a two-level categorisation into theories borrowed more or less unchanged from social science, and a much less well defined notion of 'practice theory'. 'Practice

theory' may refer to approaches to practice such as 'crisis intervention' or 'task-centred methods' or 'community development'. Now insofar as practice theory comprises precepts or directions on how work should be carried out, it differs in kind from the conception of theory as explanation which I have been arguing for. Such concepts, I wish to argue, are models rather than theories. In particular, models whose primary functions are to give directions for the conduct of practice, I shall refer to as models for practice.

To designate therefore the concepts and ideas which seem to inform practical action but which must be distinguished from theory in the strict sense, I shall postulate that all action is necessarily informed by what I shall term a model for practice; that is to say, that it is always possible to associate action with a model for practice. A model for practice is precisely what a theory is not: it is a prescription for action. Before expanding on this, it would be advisable to clarify the significance being attached here to 'model'. As already noted, terms such as 'model', 'theory', and 'hypothesis' are used loosely and variably, but a more precise delimitation of meaning is needed for the purposes of this analysis. Whereas theory is concerned with explanation, a model has different aims and is subject to different constraints. The important thing about a model is that it need not necessarily even purport to represent the truth, or to prescribe any particular aims. A model is simply an imaginative invention. The test of a model is whether it is useful or suggestive; it should have practical, heuristic or aesthetic value; a model is not of itself true or false. Of course, models which disregard what is known or believed to be true may well be rejected as useless. Useful models combine what is known in novel or interesting ways. Sometimes models are rejected as incredible but turn out later to point the way to good explanations; that is how a great many scientific advances are made. Sometimes, too, models are adopted with enthusiasm while at the same time the theory they invoke remains open to question. For example, Freud's theory of the personality as comprising the ego, id and superego remains controversial as theory, but has had enormous practical impact as a device for trying to change behaviour.

Thus, in social work and other practical interventions a model for practice is a particular sort of model which serves the purpose of helping the practitioner to take account of the relevant factors. I use the phrase model for practice in preference to the more common model of practice in order to emphasise the prescriptive and a priori nature of such models, and also to lessen the chances of mis-identification in this particular terminological jungle. (Bartlett (1970) however uses the phrase 'model for

practice' in a somewhat different sense to the one I adopt.)

In simple terms then, a model for practice is something which tells the practitioner what to do. There is, as I shall argue presently, much more to practising than possessing a model for practice; nonetheless, the model for practice was originally conceived as the central complex of the practitioner's equipment. A model for practice may be thought of as a system of propositions and prescriptions on matters relating to the content of the practice. However, as Schön and others argue, one should make no assumptions about whether the practitioner is able to express such propositions and prescriptions in a coherent manner, or even at all. Following too the research on this matter, it must be assumed that practitioners frequently possess implicit conceptualisations which they are not easily able to express verbally.

If a practitioner is unable to express his model for practice in verbal terms, it may seem rather debatable that he could truly be said to possess one at all. In claiming that he necessarily does, I am making a definitional statement founded on a philosophical assumption. The definitional statement is to the effect that a model for practice is nonetheless a model for practice even if it has not been given a clear or persuasive verbal expression. The philosophical assumption is that individuals' actions, in all their plurality and diversity, are the product of the interaction of a mind and self which retain their individuality and distinctive characteristics and persist in a relatively stable form over time, with a variety of environmental stimuli. The presumption is that each individual possesses some system of attributes which, if explicated, would make it possible to explain the pattern of his actions. It follows formally from this that if we had a sufficient knowledge of someone's model for practice and the circumstances he was faced with, we would be able to predict his actions. A model for practice is as it were an abstraction from the individual's accumulated experience; and its content in turn shapes his future action whether or not he fully understands it.

As previously mentioned, a model in general is an invention which will probably take into account whatever its owner believes to be true about the objects of its concern. It was originally postulated that a model for practice will be informed by ideas under each of the following four categories, which will be discussed in turn.

The first class of ideas which inform a model for practice comprises assumptions of a metatheoretical or epistemological nature concerning what is to count as true and relevant knowledge and valid inference. These are essentially rules of procedure rather

than stipulations of necessary content. I have argued that the dominant tradition in social work is drawn directly from the mainstream of empiricism; but that at least two minority traditions are also discernible, based respectively on a humanist social action perspective and on critical theory. Beliefs about the proper foundations of knowledge for practice have an all-pervasive influence on the substance. We may compare, for example, the approach represented by authors such as Sheldon and Davies with that of Wilkes or England.

The second class of ideas comprises moral and political values. There is a virtually universal consensus that values enter crucially into the practice of social work; I have argued elsewhere that a value-neutral social work is impossible (Clark with Asquith, 1985). However, although there is a large measure of agreement in the literature on what would be the values of social work, embracing for example 'respect for persons', 'self determination' or 'social justice', there is overwhelming reason to believe that social workers do not in fact all adhere to the same substantive values in the sphere of practice. It is necessary therefore to take this into account in describing a practitioner's model for practice.

The third class of ideas refers to a body of substantive social science knowledge, such for example as those dealing with social deprivation, poverty and unemployment. In terms of the typology of Chapter 2, it includes theoretical knowledge - K7 to K10.

The fourth class covers specific definitions or conceptions of social problems: for example, the view that relative deprivation actually exists and that it is due to societal structure and not individual deficiency. It is fair to point out that this class is largely derivative of the preceding three. However, it was retained as a separate category in order to facilitate clearer identification.

Three important observations must be made at this point. Firstly, the considerations listed above are not independent, but interpenetrate. For example, defining a given state of affairs as a social problem presupposes, as already implied, at least a moral or political position and a certain understanding of social reality. The choice of headings here is primarily a matter of convenience for identifying relevant areas. Secondly, as previously explained it should not be assumed that the content under each heading is clearly or explicitly identified in the mind of the practitioner. I wish to argue not that every practitioner has clearly formulated, say, the social science knowledge that he uses, but simply that a model for practice relies explicitly or implicitly upon some social

science knowledge. Thirdly, the elements summarised under the four headings do not suffice to define the model, but are rather in the nature of boundary constraints. The rules for intervention at the core of the model have still to be specified.

The model for practice is, then, conceived as something drawing from but distinct from the practitioner's knowledge and values. It therefore embodies what might be termed a conservative assumption that knowledge on the one hand, and whatever it is that guides action on the other, may be different entities and should not be identified with each other at least pending further evidence. This assumption seemed advisable given the results of earlier research previously referred to.

To illustrate the assumptions which constitute, so to speak, the environment of the model for practice, consider for example the well known model of Pincus and Minahan (1977). The following observations are intended as brief typifications rather than an exhaustive treatment. (i) Epistemological assumptions. There is no mistaking the markedly positivist leaning of Pincus and Minahan's model. Problems are defined in 'objective' terms as amenable to technical solutions. There is a pervasive reification of concepts such as 'society' and 'man'; they are treated as natural objects rather than the product of human action. The positivist framework provides a natural host for the functionalist sociology which informs their model.

(ii) In the sphere of moral or political values, Pincus and Minahan's discussion is handicapped by the difficulty of satisfactorily accommodating moral questions at all in a positivist and functionalist framework. Their comment about social workers has, ironically, a reference to themselves: 'ethical questions are ambiguous and make us feel uncomfortable - we like to avoid them' (1977, p.94). The natural outcome of their theoretical position would probably be a thoroughgoing determinism. However, this flies so much in the face of traditional social work values that the authors are impelled to make conventional obeisances to the need for self-determination and the dangers of manipulation. For Pincus and Minahan the essential values of social work are stated in terms of society's obligation to provide people with various resources in a way which respects their dignity and individuality (1977, p. 92). Unfortunately this does little more than beg the real questions.

(iii) The social science knowledge in Pincus and Minahan's model is intentionally skeletal. Nonetheless, as already remarked the framework is strongly functionalist. Key importance is attached to the concepts of resource systems and life tasks. Despite the

language of 'systems' however, systems theory of the kind articulated by von Bertalanffy (1971) and his followers plays no significant part in the authors' scheme.

(iv) For Pincus and Minahan social problems are defined essentially in terms of the inadequacies of 'societal resource systems'. Social problems are seen as attributes not of persons but of social situations. This again is consistent with the functionalist approach.

The actual constituents of the Pincus and Minahan model are developed from these assumptions. Thus the various parties involved in social work intervention are seen as belonging to one or more of the four 'systems' - change agent system, client system, target system and action system. Relationships between members of systems are characterised as based on collaboration, bargaining, or conflict. Social work intervention is seen as a more or less orderly sequence of steps in a process of a common general form.

It may now be observed that the so-called 'methods' of social work are better, within this terminology, referred to as models for practice. To speak of a method implies defining techniques for reaching an acknowledged goal; a method is a subsidiary adjunct to a model. But the practices of, say, casework, groupwork, community work and residential work entail knowledge, values and definitions of social problems which significantly differentiate one from another in both means and ends. To designate them all as methods of social work neglects the differences.

What is the relationship of social science knowledge to models for practice in social work? As has already been suggested, plausible models for practice will have regard to what is known or believed to be true about a range of relevant social and psychological phenomena. The model for practice will have some coherence with the scientific, methodological, and philosophical assumptions which inform its owner's understanding of what he is trying to do. There is, however, no very definite or exact relationship; it is perfectly reasonable for practitioners who hold similar sociological and psychological views to adopt rather different models for practice. This is partly because a number of other factors enter into the account, which will be discussed below. Apart from this, there is also the fact that the social science knowledge deemed relevant is not in general comprehensive enough to point ineluctably to a particular model for practice. If one adopted, for example, the Freudian psychology of Hollis's (1964) model, one could without any inconsistency adopt other models which make use of a similar Freudian



perspective but looked quite different in practice. Pincus and Minahan's model is interesting for its supposed non-adoption of any specific sociology or psychology; it is purportedly usable as a framework into which a great variety of sociological and psychological knowledge might be fitted.

While therefore some common general perspective is likely to underlie the social science knowledge and a model for practice expressed by any practitioner or proposed by any theoretician, the correspondence between them may be far from exact. It is probably fair to say, however, that some models for practice are more closely related to specific pieces of social science theory than others; and the narrowness of these theories will allow of less flexibility in the devising of relevant models for practice. Thus, for example, crisis intervention is derived from a relatively restricted area of theory and suggests a more specific, and limited, model for practice than, say, the inclusive model of Pincus and Minahan. Recent British literature has indeed tended to focus more narrowly on specific needs and specific models, in contrast to the broad base more typical of American models.

The inexact relationship between models for practice and the complex of pertinent knowledge and values indicates that it would be unsafe to assume that a practitioner only possesses one model. Common experience indeed suggests the opposite, since practitioners in any field normally talk about having a range of ways of going about the various tasks they address; and one would think of a practitioner who possessed only a single approach as sorely limited and inflexible. Social workers often speak of using an 'eclectic' approach; and although one may have grounds for entertaining the thought that this is sometimes simply a cover for sloppy reasoning, it certainly reinforces the presumption that most practitioners use several models for practice. The process of action is likely therefore to entail reference to a repertoire of models for practice and the selection of that most suited to the occasion.

The looseness of the link between theory and models for practice in social work or any other field is of considerable significance, as it helps to make intelligible the complexity of the relationship between theory and practice. It may well be that a doubly false analogy based on the classic (positivist) model of the relationship of natural science to technology has interfered with our understanding of the relationship of theory and practice in social work. According to this perspective, when natural science is given practical application as technology, the model for practice adopted is very similar to the scientific law or theory which informs it. Thus the electrician who uses Ohm's Law to

The core skills of social work

(Excerpt from 'Statement of requirements for qualification in social work', CCETSW, 1989)

3.1 Cognitive skills

Qualifying social workers must be able to:

- analyse and evaluate their own and others personal experience;
- analyse and clarify concepts and issues
- apply knowledge and understanding to practice
- use research findings in practice

3.2 Interpersonal skills

Qualifying social workers must be able to:

- make and sustain working relationships;
- recognise and work with feelings and their impact on themselves and other people;
- recognise and work with personal, racial, social and cultural differences;
- use authority;
- recognise and work with aggression, hostility and anger with full consideration of risk to self and others;
- assist with the provision of physical care;
- observe, understand and interpret behaviour and attitudes;
- communicate verbally, non-verbally and in writing;
- structure and carry out interviews in a variety of circumstances;
- negotiate, network, work in partnership;
- act as an advocate.

3.3 Decision making skills

Qualifying social workers must be able to:

- decide when a decision is required;
- make decisions with and, where necessary on behalf of individuals, families and groups;
- identify decisions which require prior consultation with other staff;
- work within organisational decision making processes;
- make decisions where collaboration with other agencies and professionals is necessary.

3.4 Administrative skills

Qualifying social workers must be able to:

- record accurately and succinctly;
- carry out agency policy in relation to confidentiality and subject access;
- prepare and present reports;
- organise, plan time and monitor work;
- obtain information using relevant technology.

3.5 Skills in using resources

Qualifying social workers must be able to:

- investigate and identify the need for services;
- influence development of service;
- use the physical environment of an establishment to improve the quality of life of residents;
- appreciate and use creatively the resources of an establishment and social networks.

work out how to wire a circuit is supposed to use a model which is practically identical to the scientific law. Sometimes, of course, the model for practice adopted may deviate from a strict reading of the relevant laws and theories, giving rise eventually to the discrepancies rather unhelpfully described as differences between theory and practice.

Now Schön (1983) has shown that this is an unsatisfactory account of the process even in the world of engineering; but as he also argues, the classic model of 'Technical Rationality' is extremely influential even if it has never been particularly accurate. The analogy for the application of theory in the practice of social work is doubly false however because for practical purposes in science and technology the relevant scientific knowledge often does provide a very good basis for a model for practice. But for the social sciences and social work, such a close correspondence seldom if ever exists; this is further reason why a different conception is needed.

3.2.2 Skill

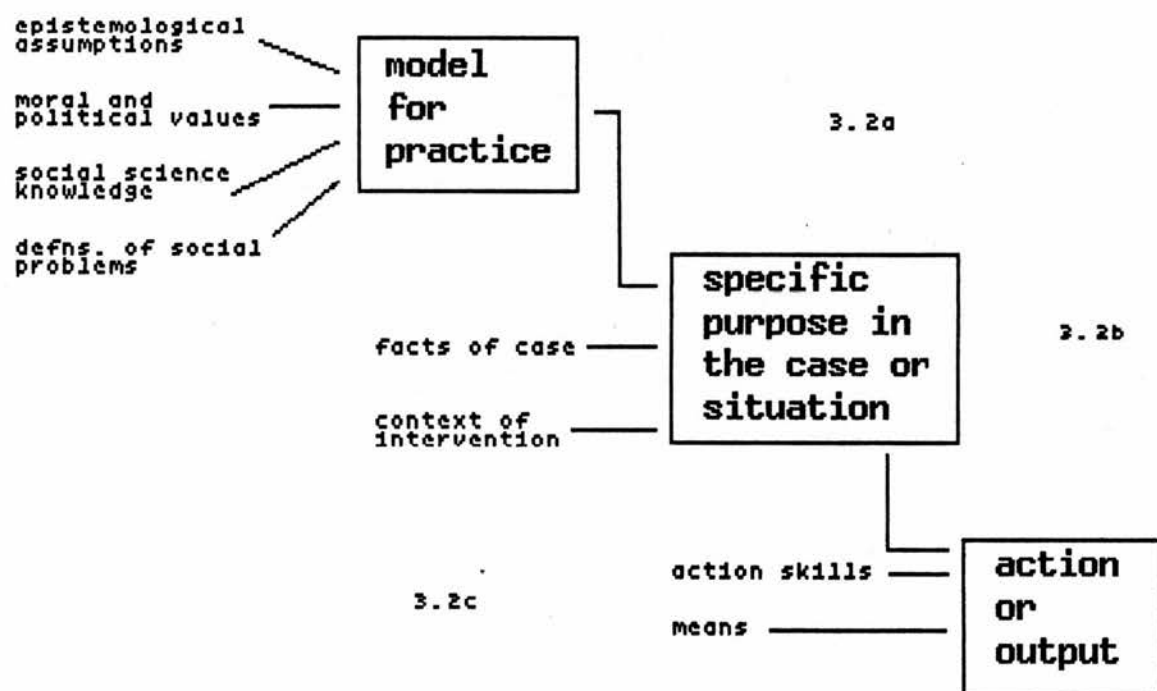
The discussion of models for practice has focused on the practitioner's cognitive faculties, including what was referred to in Chapter 2 as 'knowing that'. But there is more to effectiveness than the strictly cognitive; it is universally expected that the practitioner should 'know how', or to put it differently, that he should command certain action skills. Skill mediates the translation of knowledge into effective action. When we speak of 'skill' we often mean neither the purely cognitive nor the purely unthinking application of previously acquired capabilities, but some combination of the two. A skill may also be said to subsist in the ability to apply knowledge.

The skills required of social workers have recently been the subject of an exhaustive debate in the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, and elsewhere, in connection with proposals for a major reform of social work education. The debate has demonstrated how difficult it is even to agree what a 'skill' is, and then to compile a credible list of skills required that is neither absurdly over ambitious nor merely banal. Nevertheless CCETSW's formal statement may be considered reasonably authoritative. It is reproduced in Annex 3.1 for reference. It envisages five main categories of skill: cognitive, interpersonal, decision making, administrative, and use of resources.

In referring to skills in the action model I mean to designate interpersonal, practical

FIG. 3.2

Action model: original version



and instrumental skills rather than higher-order cognitive skills. The exercise of the latter was considered, in the action model, integrally with the practitioner's model for practice. Broadly speaking therefore, 'skills' in the action model corresponds with the latter four categories of the CCETSW scheme, and excludes more fundamental cognitive skills.

3.2.3 The action model: original version

The action model represents an attempt to identify in general and abstract terms the main factors which might have a bearing on the conduct and outcome of practice in social interventions such as social work and community work, with a particular focus on the attributes of the practitioner. It also suggests, in a provisional way, what might be the relationship of these factors. The action model is, as previously stated, the substance of the dynamic hypothesis referred to earlier; it informed the design and conduct of the empirical components of the research. The action model was continually revised in the light of experience, and its subsequent development will be explained in Chapter 9. What is presented here is the original exploratory sketch, which was first developed on the basis of earlier versions of the arguments presented in this and the previous chapter.

The foregoing subsections have developed the notion of a model for practice, which was conceived as the central complex of the practitioner's equipment, and drawn attention to the place of skill. It remains now to relate these practitioner attributes to the process of practice in its entirety, and thus complete the action model.

A model for practice entails certain knowledge and beliefs, as previously explained. These are shown diagrammatically in Fig. 3.2a, which depicts the first stage of the action model. While an individual's model for practice will be modified over time in the light of experience, it is assumed to be a relatively enduring thing during the conduct of each particular intervention.

What happens when a practitioner addresses himself to a specific piece of work? The second stage of the action model, shown in Fig. 3.2b, postulates that he brings together in his own understanding the following elements:

- his model for practice

- the specific facts of the case or situation, such as who the client is, what the problem is, and so on
- information about the context in which the problem arises and in which an alleviation is sought, comprising for example a certain remit for the agency or worker, the availability of certain resources, etc.

This bringing together enables an assessment of the problem or situation, and an opinion on what action should be taken. The outcome is the definition of specific tasks appropriate to the case or situation. The process envisaged here is that of data gathering and appraisal, common to general problem-solving models in numerous applied fields; in social work it is usually called assessment.

In the third stage, shown as Fig 3.2c, is the action phase similarly common to general problem-solving models. Here the purpose specific to the case, resulting from the assessment process, has to be brought together with the necessary action skills, such as those set out in Item (ii), Annex 3.1, and with the practical means, such as the worker's time, and facilities and resources in general. This leads to the outcome in that particular case.

Evidently this exploratory model can be no more than a crude representation of a complex process. It cannot be assumed that the stages will always follow the progression implied or that, for example, the full facts of the case are always properly considered before the worker makes up his mind what to do. Notwithstanding these limitations and bearing in mind its deliberately provisional character, the action model was used to help devise the practical instruments of this research, which will be described in Chapter 6.

3.3 Expertise and the expert observer

The central topic of this research is the application of knowledge to practice, or as it might equally be stated, the nature of expertise. This is potentially awkward since the attributes necessary to perform research are also, in a way, the topic of the research. The expertise not only of the subjects but also of the researcher is at issue, since the researcher, too, is necessarily also a practitioner (though in a different sphere). To put it rather shortly, the expertise involved in this research entails the understanding of expertise. In this discussion I hope to demonstrate the principles which have informed the approach to this issue. I also intend that the theory of practitioners' action arrived

at by the study of the empirical material to be presented later should be congruent with the methodological premisses discussed here; for if no analogy can be shown between social welfare practice and the practice of research, any consequent theory of action must be suspect.

The expertise that a researcher needs to carry out her intended project is a neglected topic in the literature. Expertise is demonstrated implicitly in the report or other finished output; and it is judged as satisfactory or otherwise by the readers on the basis of such internal evidence as the knowledge shown of past work, critical appraisal of the issues and evidence, quality of the research design, and so forth. However, the content of the necessary expertise generally receives little critical discussion. It is indeed largely taken for granted in the sense that identifying the requisite expertise is treated as non problematic for and by the public of acknowledged fellow experts. I wish to argue that more depends on understanding this expertise than is generally recognised; and that this applies to research carried out from within any paradigm.

The researcher is expected to possess the range of skill and knowledge appropriate to the theoretical issues and instrumental to the artful execution of the project. For example, a biologist might need to be expert, *inter alia*, in the recognition and taxonomy of a number of species, or in the management of certain kinds of cell cultures. A social scientist might need to be expert in some kinds of statistical analysis. Inherent in the practice of such expertise are the innumerable day to day skilful acts which constitute its stock in trade. Many of these may be open to inspection in the sense that the researcher would be able to justify them if challenged, by reference to the literature and the standard techniques of the discipline. However, submerged in the practice of any research there is also a body of techniques and assumptions which rest on much less demonstrable foundations. They are absorbed by learners and practitioners and acquire the status of accepted, and acceptable, practice. For instance newcomers to any scientific work are soon taught to disregard what might be regarded as 'wild' experimental observations or results, beyond the range of what seems reasonable in the context. They learn to make practical judgements about the validity of data. And yet the grounds for identifying a result as wild are often unclear; one risks discarding a result which is potentially all the more interesting precisely because it seems to be anomalous.

Another, related aspect of the possession of expertise is the ability to make intuitive inferences on the basis of incomplete information; a mark of the expert is the knack of

guessing accurately what is happening before the full evidence has been assembled. This ability is based on familiarity with certain kinds of situations, built up through long experience, and the often intuitive presumption that the present case is likely to be relevantly similar. It will probably entail the implicit use of conformity explanations. Although ideally we expect the expert to verify her hunches before actually acting upon them, it is obvious that the expert's good guess has the potential of greatly speeding up any process of investigation. The wide experience of the expert enables her to filter, classify, and assess observations for their utility without having to give this process much conscious thought. It involves an almost subconscious comparison of the observed phenomenon with a range of models which experience leads the expert to suppose are likely to be relevant to the case in hand.

It is perhaps worth stressing that the role of expertise in the sense advanced here is no less significant in disciplines based on the hard sciences than it is in social science or everyday life. What is at issue here is not the content of knowledge, but the way of knowing, the basis of that knowledge and the manner of its application. 'Know-how' or 'clinical experience' are only different names for the practical knowledge that guides the researcher as much as any other practitioner.

Expertise is inescapable, but of course it also notoriously fallible. Experts can be, and often are, wrong, and one reason is that their expertise is an instrument narrowly attuned to a limited scope; as it alerts them to the likely significance of some factors, so also and necessarily it reduces their sensitivity to others. The only safeguard is that their reasons and actions should be open to inspection by disinterested observers.

It follows therefore that in the design and evaluation of formal research, the expertise of the researcher ought to be more fully addressed than is usual. The researcher's expertise is more central to the methods and outcome of research than any amount of material resources. Despite this, the researcher in many reports vanishes into near anonymity, and in so doing the specific character of her expertise is concealed and erroneously treated as if it were insignificant. Readers, of course, like to try and supply this missing information by searching for clues in what little may be revealed of the researcher's biography, in past work and through personal contact or anecdote. They feel this better enables them to judge the research.

I have argued that the researcher is an expert observer: what then is the expertise necessary to research of the kind reported here? The interpretive sociologies have

shown that ordinary, common sense knowledge is no less central to the practice of research than it is to ordinary life. Giddens (1976, p. 155), for example, puts it in these terms:

The social scientist of necessity draws upon the same sorts of skills as those whose conduct he seeks to analyse in order to describe it.

Now while it would be a large task and well beyond the scope of the present study to attempt an anatomy of common sense knowledge, it is desirable to indicate in general terms the expertise that underlies a project such as this one. It will be convenient also to consider the significance of certain other attributes of the researcher.

Of all the ordinary knowledge indispensable to the practice of research, the most vital must be that of language. Where, as in the interpretive sociologies, the aim is to construct the meaning of social action, we must go far beyond the fairly mechanical interpretation of grammar, syntax and vocabulary that might be within the competence of a learner of a foreign language. We must understand such things as allusions, jokes, clichés, submerged references, indirect quotations, popular sayings, dissimulation, satire, sarcasm, irony, metaphor, and the special usages of subcultures. We must be aware of the different meanings attached to identical words according to the speaker and the context. We must be able to supply the unsaid, and appreciate how the verbal content of an utterance may be modified or contradicted by accompanying signs and gestures. Language is the matrix of culture and action; without it they have no existence. Most of the practical knowledge identified more specifically below can also be construed as a subclass of this deep knowledge of language.

The second area of expertise is a close cousin of the first. In addition to language, we must reckon the everyday understanding of non-verbal behaviour as vital to the comprehension of social action. This would include, for example, gesture, posture, facial expression and other bodily signs. Of course it is possible, by study, experience or the possession of a particular aptitude, to enhance and enlarge upon the commonplace level of appreciation of these phenomena, just as one can become more than commonly proficient in the understanding of language. It can hardly be doubted that some forms of social research (and some forms of social intervention) do actually demand extraordinary skill in these areas.

A third area of expertise or practical knowledge that may be identified as crucial to research of the kind reported here is about the disciplines, conventions, ideologies and

practices of the field in question. In this study we are concerned especially with social work, community development, voluntary action, and the newer developments in these fields which relate to the recognition of unemployment. This area will be reviewed in Chapter 4.

The fourth area of expertise covers the relevant contextual knowledge, as already defined in Chapter 2. Contextual knowledge is readily acquired for each new situation, but it is worth remembering that it is largely built upon a substrate of previous knowledge and experience. It is what we have learned in the past that largely determines the shape of what we are able to learn now.

Fifthly, there will be various practical and instrumental skills necessary for effective research. These can vary from specialised laboratory techniques to the survival skills of the field anthropologist or geologist. It will be explained in Chapter 6 that the instrumental skills for the present project were in part similar to those of social work or community development practice, in several senses. In the first place the research entailed some semi-participant observation, in which a familiarity with common practice is necessary for the research to be non-obtrusive and therefore effective. Secondly, it was necessary to estimate the skilfulness and competence of the practitioners who were one of the foci of interest in the field studies. Such a judgement may be made by a fellow-practitioner in any field, but the process acquires another dimension in social work as the assessment of social competence is itself presumed to be one of the particular skills of social work. Thirdly, the research techniques of observation and non-directive interview, which were heavily used in the field studies, have much in common with the everyday techniques of social intervention.

Finally in this consideration of researcher attributes, we should acknowledge those which the researcher is less able to affect than her own knowledge and expertise. In discussing participant observation, Burgess (1984, p. 88 ff) draws attention to the impact of age, gender and ethnicity among other factors. There are undoubtedly many of her own personal attributes which the researcher needs to reckon with in designing a study. For example, a bad linguist might be ill advised to attempt ethnography in a foreign culture; or a highly anxious personality would probably be ineffective doing participant observation in unstructured and threatening milieux.

The methodology of this study is, then, predicated on the centrality of the observer's

expertise where this must be understood to include not only the more specialised and formal knowledge of a field or a discipline, but also the everyday competences and the personal attributes which the researcher must necessarily bring to bear. I must hope to demonstrate the relevant specialised knowledge in the following pages. On the other hand, it is arguably much more problematic to demonstrate a sufficiently full and sound practical mastery of the language and culture specifically relevant to the selected field of action. Especially in any research where the researcher is her own chief instrument, her mistakes may be nearly impossible to detect in the report, since it is her very expertise which unwittingly conceals them.

3.4 Plan of the empirical work

As previously explained, the aim of this research is to explore the theory-practice relationship in social intervention by means of an empirical study within the particular context of voluntary action on unemployment. I have argued, in effect, that it is necessary for these purposes to be familiar with both the milieu or context within which the practice is carried on, and to attempt a new formulation of the processes whereby practitioners theorise and use knowledge. These considerations led to the main structural features of this study.

At the outset of this study there was no systematic information available on the extent and character of voluntary initiatives relating to unemployment which used what might loosely be termed a community development or social action approach. On the basis of the current periodical literature and anecdotal information, it seemed very likely that such work would be quite widespread and common; but its organisational base, purposes, extent, methods, and resources remained matters for conjecture. So also, and more crucially for the purposes of this research, did the nature and respective prevalence of the models for practice adopted by workers in this field. It was decided therefore to carry out a preliminary survey of the field, which would serve to describe the context of this practice more fully than was possible on the basis of the literature. A short postal survey was carried out of all known relevant voluntary organisations then operating in Scotland. The design, execution and results of the survey are described in the next two chapters.

The second and major phase of the empirical work was to be a detailed, in-depth study

of a limited number of practitioners and their organisations operating within the designated field. The results of the survey would both inform the sampling necessary for field studies, and indicate in a preliminary way some of the factors and issues having a bearing on the shape of practice.

On the basis of the survey therefore the observation and analysis of individual practitioners' work would proceed on a larger understanding of prevailing ideas in the field. It would also necessarily be informed by my own expertise, as discussed in the previous section. The methodology and the choice of field are, then, interdependent in this research, especially in the field studies. Had I been approaching an unfamiliar area a different research design would have been needed. It seemed however that there would be important advantages in exploring the theory-practice question within a sphere that was already to some extent known to me. What we are concerned with here is meaning and action which are only accessible to an observer who can become at least in some sense an insider, while at the same time retaining the detachment of the outsider. To select a field already known to the researcher affords at least a significant economy of effort.

The field studies are reported in Chapters 6 to 9. As well as gathering and systematising a fair volume of empirical material, the effort in this part of the study was directed towards reformulating the action model.

CHAPTER 4

The social services, the voluntary sector and unemployment

4.1 Introduction

The recent history of unemployment in Britain is an object lesson in how rapidly and completely conventional expectations, attitudes and policies can be overturned by events. In the mid 1960's the numbers of the unemployed began to rise somewhat from the minimal level typical of the postwar years. By the mid-70's, the official unemployment level of around 4% (Unemployment Unit, 1986) was still low enough to mean that few people entertained any serious fear that the Beveridge assumption of full employment was becoming untenable; and on this assumption depended the entire postwar economic strategy for ensuring general prosperity and averting individual poverty. Only a handful of social scientists gave much attention to the phenomenon. But in 1986, with an official figure of 14% (or 15.5% on the old count) (Unemployment Unit, 1986) the prevalence and seriousness of unemployment was already a commonplace. As Showler and Sinfield (1981, p. 217) had earlier put it, 'Most groups in society now acquiesce in levels of unemployment that were regarded as unthinkable or just part of economic history less than a decade ago'. Not only was the extent of unemployment the subject of regular detailed documentation, but it had probably become the economic statistic which received most prominence in the media - replacing the inflation level of the 1970s and the balance of payments deficit of the 1960s. In short, it is now scarcely necessary to argue that unemployment is real, widespread, and deeply damaging in its consequences for the individual and for local communities. The volume, and pace of development, of government programmes implemented by the Manpower Services Commission and its successor bodies to mitigate the problem, amply underlines the point.

The focus of this chapter will be on contemporary responses to unemployment from workers and organisations in the social welfare field. I shall review the evidence on the response of the statutory social services, and on the efforts of voluntary social service

organisations. I will show that mainstream social workers have found it very difficult to devise coherent responses to the obvious unemployment of so many of their clients; as already suggested, unemployment has been a highly perplexing problem for workers and organisations in social welfare generally. I shall demonstrate that innovation in this area has mostly come from workers using community work approaches and based in voluntary organisations. In the course of this review I shall therefore give an account of the approaches or theories which community workers have offered in the literature to explain their involvement with unemployment, and of their hopes and purposes in working with unemployed people. These ideas will be important reference markers when it comes to examining the content of practice revealed in the field studies.

The fact that responses to unemployment have been led by community workers rather than their colleagues in the mainstream of social work perhaps raises the rather elderly question of the relationship of the two occupational groups and their arts. The question is also important for the main themes of this research. To understand it, a brief historical digression may be useful.

The key formulations of the contemporary community work ideology date from the late 1960's and early 1970's; seminal documents were the two Gulbenkian reports (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1968, 1973). At the same period, mainstream social work underwent its generic reorganisation inspired by the Kilbrandon (1964) and Seeborn (1968) reports. Debates of that time centred on whether community work was 'part of' social work, or indeed vice versa (Baldock, 1974; CCETSW, 1974). In this climate, influential individuals and organisations argued for a broad conception of social work which would recognise a large number of domains of practice as cognate and complementary. This approach was reflected in the doctrine of the four 'methods' of social work noted in Chapter 2.

To a large extent the view that community work was part of social work won the day in practical and organisational terms. Community work practice was established as part of the activities of the Seeborn departments (Thomas and Warburton, 1975); at least one major Scottish social work department made major commitments to community work (Worthington, 1977); and training for it was recognised by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work as part of mainstream social work training. No separate occupational identity was created for community workers in the formative years of the 1970's. On the other hand, it must be said that many community workers were never persuaded that community work was, or should be, part of social work.

They felt that it had distinctive and more radical aims than established social work, and ought to develop its own separate body of knowledge and training.

While various schools of thought on the relationship of social work and community work each had their adherents, the argument about principles gradually died away in the 1980's without any clear theoretical resolution despite some attempts in that direction (Thomas, 1983). The question, which had generated much passion in the formative years, eventually became rather sterile, and was largely overtaken by the rise of the newer growth of community social work (Barclay, 1982).

In this thesis I take the view that community work, in consideration of its basic concerns, its approach to its tasks, its occupational culture and its location in specific social institutions, shares in essence the relevant key features of social work as a whole. There are differences, but what is in common is far weightier in the current context than what divides them. Further, community workers are likely to be trained on social work courses; only one other occupational category is highly significant in this respect, that of community education (in Scotland) or youth and community work (in England and Wales). It is therefore reasonable to suppose that community workers use knowledge and 'theory' in practice in a way which is essentially similar to that of social workers generally.

Why then is unemployment a relevant concern for social welfare organisations? It could perhaps be argued that unemployment is an economic problem and that the proper place to look for a remedy is in changed economic policies. It is of course undeniable that changing economic and political doctrines have had a marked effect on the level of unemployment (Showler, 1981). But it would be altogether too narrow to treat unemployment as exclusively an economic problem. The social consequences of unemployment are increasingly acknowledged, and some of them have implications for social welfare agencies. Hakim (1982) has usefully summarised these consequences, which may be paraphrased under five headings: (i) personal financial effects (ii) damage to health and increased mortality (iii) mental health effects (iv) increased crime and delinquency (v) damage to the social fabric as shown by increased rates of family breakup, homelessness, racial tension, and the like. Now the evidence on the exact nature and extent of these consequences is far from complete. For example, the observed higher morbidity amongst the unemployed in itself tells us nothing about its causation. What is beyond doubt however is that unemployment is associated with an increased incidence of many of the problems that social welfare organisations exist to

respond to. A short list might comprise poverty; poor health; depression; loss of meaningful role; family strain. All of these are well within the ambit of the statutory social services. Voluntary social action organisations have not only addressed themselves to mitigating the consequences of unemployment, but also considered what steps might be taken to reduce its incidence. This will be considered in detail below. First, the response of the statutory social services will be considered.

4.2 Unemployment and the statutory social services

Social workers and others in the state welfare services can hardly fail to be aware that unemployment is one of the central social facts for many of their clients individually, and for many communities affected by local pockets of extremely high unemployment. It seems likely that a disproportionate number of clients come from families affected by unemployment (AMA, 1985; Bennett and Barnes, 1982; Nash, 1983; Popay, 1984). But the problems consequent upon unemployment are extremely intractable if no remedy of their cause is in prospect. Quite simply, what the unemployed client usually needs most of all is a job, and social welfare services are scarcely equipped to help him find one; much less can they create new jobs to alleviate the wider situation which precipitates individuals into unemployment. The social services were not set up with this in mind. The limited evidence available suggests indeed that social service bureaucracies have not treated unemployment as a relevant factor in the management of services, since data on employment status are not routinely collected. The indications from the modest literature on the subject are that social services have only tentatively engaged with the problem of unemployment. It would not be too fanciful to suggest that the scale and suddenness of the unemployment problem may have left social workers, like so many other groups in society, with a sense of perplexity and impotence. An understanding of employment-related questions forms no significant part of their training or professional culture. Besides, the rise in unemployment has happened at a time when the funding of social welfare services has been cut severely for the first time since the war, leaving them to face increased demands with even less resources both relatively and absolutely.

The main emphasis in social services departments' work with the unemployed appears to have been on welfare rights. It is relatively straightforward to offer this service, which is one of the most highly demanded by client populations in general. It has an obvious relevance to the pressing problems of poverty which often follow becoming unemployed. Some observers, for example Etherington (1984a), Sinfield (1982), have proposed that

welfare rights work ought to be a central part of work with the unemployed. Counselling those affected in regard to family and personal problems is also noted as relevant. In general however, it would appear that unemployment is a peripheral concern for statutory social work agencies. The neglect of unemployment may well be due to social workers having little experience or preparation for dealing with employment-related issues, reinforced perhaps by pessimism that their efforts can have any real effect on such a large-scale societal problem.

4.3 Responses to unemployment from community work, the voluntary sector, and the trade unions

While the response of the mainstream statutory social services to the problem of unemployment has been slight, the same cannot be said of the voluntary sector or of community work. One of the main traditional, and continuing, justifications for the existence of a voluntary sector in social welfare is that it is uniquely placed to experiment and innovate in a way which is impossible for the statutory sector (Brenton, 1985; Johnson, 1981; Wolfenden, 1978). On the issue of unemployment there is a ferment of activity in community work and the voluntary sector. The greater part of it is newly established, experimental, or simply reflects current discussion. It will be convenient to review this activity under a number of headings.

4.3.1 Community work

Community workers were perhaps the first in the social welfare sector to take a serious interest in unemployment. The Association of Community Workers' annual conference in 1978 was devoted to the theme and a collection of conference papers was published (ACW, 1978). In the following year a volume in the National Institute for Social Work/Routledge and Kegan Paul community work series was concerned with the links between community work and employment issues (Craig, Mayo and Sharman, 1979). These events do not signal the beginning of community workers' interest in unemployment, however. It may be traced at least as far back as the Community Development Projects of the early 70's. The history of the CDPs has been thoroughly documented (Loney, 1983) and a brief summary will suffice here. The CDPs were originally set up to combat deprivation in local communities by bringing about a more intensive and better coordinated delivery of the standard social services. The projects carried out detailed and wide-ranging studies of the problems of their local areas. The

common theme to emerge from these studies was that the poverty and deprivation the projects were set up to alleviate did not originate primarily from within the communities affected. These problems were rather the consequence of much broader economic, political and social processes, and any work carried out at the local level could only have a mildly remedial effect at best. One of the key factors seen as affecting local prosperity was of course the success, or lack of it, of local industry, which in turn had to be seen not in isolation but in context as part of the international capitalist system. This analysis had major implications for the whole running and future of the CDPs because, among other things, it rejected the essentially localised theory of social deprivation upon which they had originally been set up.

In the aftermath of CDP some community workers began to explore the possibility of links between community work and trade unionism. As an occupation, community work represents a number of rather disparate interests but in terms of its major ideologies and practices, its sources of legitimation and its sponsoring bodies, it has been dominated in Britain by the social welfare 'industry' in general and more particularly by social work. With this background, the idea of linking up with trade unions represented something of a new departure for community workers. An attractive argument stimulated this exploration. On the one hand, social welfare and community work had long been concerned with the domestic and community sphere of life; personal, home and family concerns predominated. On the other hand, trade unionism was concerned with the public sphere of production and economic policy and its locus was the workplace and the party meeting. Feminists very plausibly suggested that this division in society mirrored the division between gender roles: the community was nurturing, feminine, 'soft'; industry was productive, masculine, 'hard'. A class analysis however, would require the recognition of an identity of basic interests between those involved in community action and those involved in industrial issues. The point of bringing together action in the two spheres would lie in the belief that action in either one alone was considered unlikely to result in any significant basic improvement in the circumstances and life chances of the working class. At the local level, problems in communities tend to be concentrated in precisely those areas most seriously affected by industrial decline; the community and the workplace are closely interdependent. According to some versions, community work and trade unionism practised in isolation from each other might actually be counterproductive in that they would merely facilitate the continued operation of the exploitative capitalist system.

Towards the end of the 1970s there were, then, ample grounds for community workers

to take an interest in employment issues as a result of the recent history of community work, besides their ordinary general concern about a rapidly developing social problem. A further development of great significance stimulated this interest. As unemployment became an increasing political embarrassment, governments took a series of emergency measures intended to absorb some of the unemployed and increase their employability. The Manpower Services Commission was the agency given the task of implementing the programmes. The Job Creation Programme, started in 1976, was the first of a long series of programmes (including STEP, CEP, CP, ET) which have been continued ever since on a generally rising trend of numbers. In its continual attempts to devise suitable, but not too costly, programmes at very short notice the MSC turned both to the statutory social services and to voluntary social welfare agencies to sponsor the projects they did not themselves have the resources to devise, initiate, plan or manage in detail. Community workers were very often involved in originating and managing these schemes. A powerful incentive drove this involvement: at a time when funding in both statutory and voluntary sectors of social welfare was becoming more difficult than at any time since the late sixties if not longer, the MSC disbursed its relatively ample funds at an almost reckless rate. In community work and in the voluntary sector doubts have been raised about the political desirability and practical wisdom of accepting such relatively massive inputs from government; but despite these doubts the usual pattern has been to protest somewhat feebly about undesirable aspects of the schemes, and then take the money.

Within community work circles it was not, however, universally accepted that work with the unemployed was necessarily a relevant concern for community workers. Ohri and Roberts (1981) were scathingly critical of community workers' pretensions to tackle such a large scale and deep rooted problem by means of the typical localised initiatives of community work. They did, however, assert (on no very clear grounds) that community workers should support unemployed workers' centres, and foster the building of alliances and links 'between economic activity, social issues and community organisations'. In a later paper (Gallacher, Ohri and Roberts, 1983) the authors took the similar view that, since unemployment was a structural economic problem, small-scale local job creation could only have a marginal impact and was therefore largely irrelevant. They saw community workers as being well placed to organise the unemployed around the two kinds of problems the latter faced: financial difficulty, and demoralisation and isolation. They advocated a campaigning approach. For all that the article is primarily a piece of ideological prescription rather than an evaluation of the likely effectiveness of the approaches proposed and rejected. On the other side, in a

TABLE 4.1

Typical intermediary bodies concerned with unemployment

	local	national
specialist	resource centre enterprise trust	Community Business Scotland Centre for Employment Initiatives British Unemployment Resource Network
generalist	council for voluntary service	Scottish Council for Community and Voluntary Organisations National Council for Voluntary Organisations Scottish Community Education Council

reply to the first paper Hill (1981) tried to turn Ohri and Roberts' argument on its head by claiming that unemployment was a 'lifeline' for community workers because it would enable them to get down to 'central issues' and avoid being sidetracked into 'a host of marginal activities'. More specifically Hill proposed (in no great detail) a series of practical interventions on behalf of the unemployed. In a more extensive discussion Salmon (1983) also proposed a range of practical actions with the unemployed, and argued for circumspect collaboration with the MSC. Salmon recognised the structural nature of the unemployment problem but offered no clear argument to demonstrate how the reformist, remedial and localised practical activities he envisaged would have anything other than a purely marginal impact on the larger problems of capitalism in dismal decline.

Thomas's (1983) researches and observations tend to confirm the view that work on unemployment has become recognised as valid for mainstream community workers. Thomas proposes that 'the social and economic reconstruction of communities' (1983, p. 154) will be a major theme of community work in the 1980s, and that this will entail changes in the significance of work both for individuals and communities. The precise community work content that Thomas envisages is hard to discern amid the generally millennialist tone of his prognostications. It is nevertheless sufficiently clear that work on employment related issues is now accepted as a proper, indeed central, concern of community work.

4.3.2 Generalist intermediary bodies

Intermediary bodies were identified by the Wolfenden Report (1978) as performing a number of distinctive functions within the voluntary sector and in the relationship of the voluntary sector to government. They may be local or national, generalist or specialist. The generalist bodies are considered in this section and the specialist bodies in the next. The main role of generalist bodies is to support, develop and innovate in the voluntary sector, rather than perform direct services. Table 4.1 provides a pocket guide.

The role of generalist intermediary bodies in relation to unemployment is of particular interest in view of the development and innovation functions generally ascribed to them. If the voluntary sector of social welfare does indeed act as pathfinder, it might be expected that the issue of unemployment would have emerged as central in the last

few years. This would be reinforced by the links with community work, as many of those working for the intermediary bodies could fairly be described - and would describe themselves - as community workers. On the other hand, the councils of voluntary service, and especially the smaller ones, have a not unmerited reputation for sticking to 'safe', traditional, welfare or charitable concerns, and a reluctance to become involved in politically controversial issues. Unemployment is self-evidently a central political issue which could test the adaptability of the intermediary bodies.

The policies and literature of the traditional generalist intermediary bodies do indicate a vigorous interest in unemployment in some quarters at least. Both the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Scottish Council for Community and Voluntary Organisations (now SCVO) have had staff specifically concerned with this area, and NCVO in particular issued a number of documents arguing the role that local councils for voluntary service should take. The interest here is broadly based, covering different types of schemes which might be seen as relevant. In Scotland the Scottish Community Education Council supported a conference in 1983 dealing with responses to unemployment, and its newspaper SCAN regularly carried items describing initiatives. On the other hand there is some reason to think that the national bodies are currently leading where the local bodies are unsure about, or reluctant to, follow. An 'Employment Project Pack' issued by the Councils for Voluntary Service - National Association (1984, p. 5) noted 'Despite the fact that voluntary organisations have been involved in employment issues for a long time, some people regard such activity as illegitimate, irrelevant or downright dangerous'.

A further area of involvement for the intermediary bodies has been with the various MSC employment creation programmes. This involvement has been both to speak for the voluntary sector in general, and in the direct running of local projects. Voluntary sector involvement with the MSC has been extremely substantial and of major significance; in 1987 and 1988, over half of the voluntary sector's funding in Scotland came from the MSC (SCVO, 1986 and 1988). Indeed the volume of MSC-related activity has given rise to fears for the freedom of voluntary organisations to maintain their self-direction and financial independence.

4.3.3 Specialist intermediary bodies

The growth of specialist intermediary bodies concerned with employment issues is a sure sign of the increasing interest in this area, more particularly since many of them are of very recent foundation. The British Unemployment Resources Network was set up in 1983 and aimed to provide a national forum and information exchange. The Centre for Employment Initiatives, set up in 1981, 'offers a range of services designed to help both policy makers and practitioners respond to the challenge of unemployment and its effects upon individuals and communities' (CEI, 1984, p. 5). Community Business Scotland, again founded in 1983, and its associated bodies provide an information network and consultancy service. The 'new cooperatives' (Luyster, 1984) - workers', neighbourhood, and community cooperatives - whose development has been monitored by the Cooperative Development Agency are centrally concerned with alternative employment schemes. A number of specialist intermediary bodies are closely tied up with the community business movement, which is discussed in the following section.

4.3.4 Community businesses and local enterprise trusts

In general terms, a community business is a production or trading organisation geared to the perceived benefit of the local community rather than to the usual private sector standards of profitability. It resembles an ordinary commercial business in that it has a product or products and, if it is to survive, must compete successfully in what may well be a difficult market. On the other hand it is community oriented in that its product is seen as beneficial to the local community; it aims to generate employment in what will invariably be an economically depressed area; and its surplus, if any, is applied for the good of the community rather than to private profit. Community businesses often adopt values and operating practices more typically encountered outwith the main industrial sectors, such as a cooperative form of management, accountability to the local community rather than to owners of capital, and an over-riding concern with the wider social benefit of the organisation's activities. These objectives may well, of course, be difficult to reconcile with the commercial disciplines necessary for long term survival. The phrase 'third sector' (e.g. Murgatroyd and Smith, 1984; Community Business Ventures Unit, 1981, p. 8; SCCVO, 1985) is sometimes used to designate this area of activity which is neither in the private sector of industry nor in the public sector of state-run services.

The community business movement, with its ideology of social benefit, has much in common with the statutory and voluntary sectors of social welfare in general, and with

community work in particular. Its starting point is the perception of a set of related social problems centred on poverty, deprivation, and the corrosive social and personal consequences of unemployment. In addressing these problems however, the community business movement takes it as axiomatic that creating socially useful and personally meaningful work is the key to a solution, rather than the provision of traditional remedial or welfare programmes to mitigate the undesirable consequences of economic poverty. The significance of the community business movement therefore is that it borrows some of the methods of both industry and community work, but applies them to ends which, from the traditional point of view in either sector, are at least unconventional if not downright deviant. It is hardly necessary to rehearse the traditional arguments for maximising profitability in the private sector, or those to the effect that social welfare workers and organisations ought to keep clear of the productive sectors of the economy.

The proponents of community businesses have argued their case with an enthusiasm bordering on the evangelical. Nevertheless their concept can readily be identified with an old tradition in social thought. The rejection of the capitalist model of production for profit, and the aspiration to socially useful, non-alienated and locally accountable industrial activities, recall the communitarian socialist experiments of the nineteenth century. In our time this tradition is vigorous in the environmentalist movement. It is interesting that recycling schemes are favoured both by environmentalists and advocates of community businesses. No-one imagines, however, that the ideal is easy to put into practice, and the daily preoccupations are mundane. Efficiency and profitability are hard taskmasters, and at least in the short term may be more easily achieved by means of conventional rather than participative management practices. It should also be noted that some projects have been crucially dependent on short term MSC funding, and the transition to financial independence may demand drastic reconstruction.

Local enterprise trusts may broadly speaking be thought of as local intermediary bodies set up to promote enterprises which may embody some at least of the ideals of the community business movement. They are normally situated in highly depressed areas. There is considerable diversity which makes further generalisation of limited value (Community Business Ventures Unit, 1981).

Scotland has been a leading centre of activity in the community business movement. There are several regionally based intermediary bodies and, at a recent published count, about 80 community businesses had been established outside the Highlands up to 1986

(CBS, 1986). These facts, together with the novel ideological aspects of community businesses, make this a particularly interesting context for studying responses to unemployment.

4.3.5 The unemployed as volunteers

Offering one's spare time to do voluntary work is of course a well known and long established feature of British society. Although precise distinctions are not always easily made, especially at the margins, the key feature of volunteering is that the volunteer offers his services through the medium of an agency or organisation which may be either in the statutory or the voluntary sector. Typical agencies involved in this process are the social work and probation departments; voluntary and quasi-voluntary organisations with a high demand for direct service labour, such as the WRVS and the Red Cross; organisations catering for special needs groups such as the elderly and handicapped; specialist voluntary service organisations such as Community Service Volunteers and International Voluntary Service; and volunteer bureaux. The possible attractions of involving the unemployed as volunteers are fairly clear. On the one side, the demand for voluntary social services may seem to be almost infinitely elastic, and the unemployed have time in abundance as well as a range of possibly useful skills. The demand for voluntary help might be expected to increase at a time of increasing poverty and deprivation combined with reductions in the level of state welfare services. On the other side, volunteering might seem to offer the unemployed some of the satisfactions, if not the income, of paid work: a sense of purpose and usefulness, an escape from loss of status, isolation and depression; and the opportunity to participate in shared endeavours with others. In addition, a number of government initiatives including the Voluntary Projects Programme of the MSC and the Unemployed Voluntary Action Fund have actively sought to promote participation in volunteering by the unemployed. In spite of all these factors it is clear that voluntary work is no easy answer to the problems of the unemployed, or indeed to the needs of the sponsoring agencies. In a useful, if hurried, piece of research on the current state of affairs, Gay and Hatch (1983) indicate that unemployed people are no more likely than the population as a whole to engage in voluntary work; moreover, the unskilled and lower social class groups who in general have a lower propensity to volunteer are also those who are greatly over-represented amongst the unemployed. An indication of more profound difficulties in channelling the unemployed into voluntary work is the probability emerging from Gay and Hatch's research that the consumers of volunteers

are not generally adapted to creating opportunities which fit the distinctive interests and needs of the unemployed, or the time and skills they offer. Agencies tend to define their objectives in terms of the needs of the target group - the elderly, handicapped, etc - rather than in terms of the needs of the suppliers of the service; but 'most existing agencies do not have helping the unemployed as one of their objectives' (Gay and Hatch, 1983, p. 53).

A form of voluntary work which is specifically adapted to the unemployed is the skills exchange, whereby members offer their time and skills to a common pool from which all may draw as needed. In practice such schemes have been very difficult to sustain (Plouviez, 1984) and it seems unlikely that in themselves they can offer much benefit. However, a few schemes which combine the idea of a skills exchange with some more structured ongoing activities seem to be in a stronger position (Woulfe, n.d.).

4.3.6 Unemployed workers' centres

Unemployed workers' centres represent the main tangible response of the trade unions to the consequences of unemployment. The centres are predominantly of very recent creation. The first was established in Newcastle in 1978. In the summer of 1981 there were estimated to be 70 in Britain (Labour Research, 1983); in summer 1982 a figure of 140 was given (Paul, 1982). Figures of around 190 have been given for 1983 (Bowden, 1984; Vivian, 1984). In Scotland, the first centre was set up at the end of 1982 (Strathclyde Federation of Unemployed Workers Centres, 1985); and in February 1983 Labour Research reported replies to a survey from 11 Scottish centres, in a UK survey which attained an overall response rate of 56%. The Scottish figure for late 1983 was about 23 (Vivian, 1984), while by mid 1986 there were reported to be 24 in Strathclyde (Allison et al., 1986).

Many of the centres have depended on substantial MSC funding to sustain their activities. This has led to a curtailment of possibly 'political' activities. One theme above all emerges from the commentaries on unemployed workers' centres. Do they exist primarily to offer personal support and welfare services, or should they be concerned with the structural causes of unemployment? As Vivian (1984, p.39) puts it, 'Unemployment centres are caught between two ideals - either to make the best of things, or to be a focal point of protest against the system that creates unemployment'. There is much to suggest that the trade unions themselves are deeply ambivalent about

work with the unemployed. Although the trade unions portray themselves as one of the key institutions of a broad class-based labour movement, and not merely as workers' representatives at the place of work, they have been largely ineffectual in tackling the interests of their ex-members who have become unemployed. When a worker loses his job, he usually also loses the concern of the main organisation which represented his interests. Similarly, the trade union movement has been reluctant to fund unemployed workers' centres in any way commensurate with the resources it can apply to its traditional activities. Trade unions are defined by their relationship to the world of work; they have been slow to assimilate the new realities of non-work.

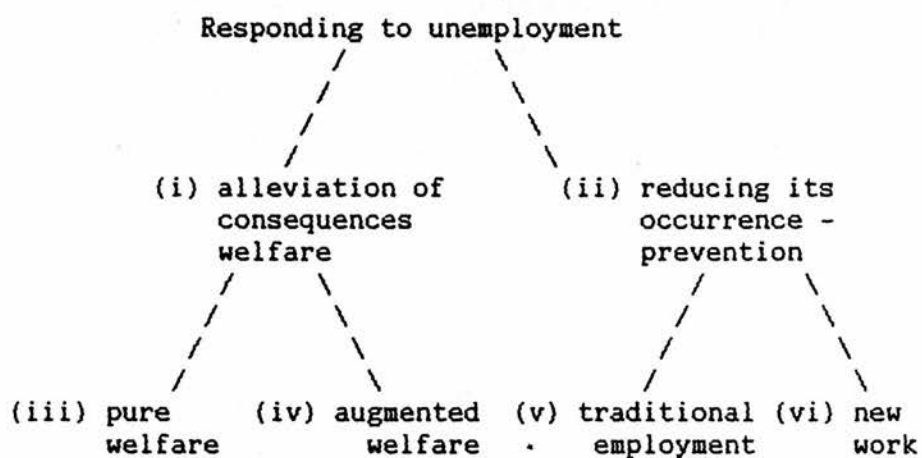
Although usually sponsored, at least in part, by the trade unions, unemployed workers' centres have not relied upon them exclusively. The relevance of such centres to this review is that they often entail a coalition of trade union and community work interests. We have here another emergence of the link between community work and unemployment. Some unemployed workers' centres may in reality owe as much to professionals in the social welfare field as to activists in the trade unions. The centres have been a focus of concern for intermediary bodies in social welfare. For these reasons it is important to consider the unemployed workers' centres in any estimation of voluntary social action with the unemployed, even though the trade unions do not constitute a part of what is conventionally regarded as the voluntary sector in social welfare.

4.4 A provisional typology of interventions related to unemployment

The literature reviewed above reveals a wide variety of actual, or conjectural, responses to unemployment. A relatively small number of themes, however, is discernible. There is direct concern for the plight of the unemployed themselves, who face poverty, isolation, loss of skills, loss of status, and mental and physical ill-health. There is frustration with the direct costs of unemployment, reflected in the list just given and in national economic statistics (cf. Fraser and Sinfield, 1985). There is also a concern with the opportunity costs of unemployment: enforced idleness exists in the midst of such obvious social problems as urban dereliction, bad housing, industrial decline, pollution, racial tension, rising drug abuse, unmet dependency amongst the aged and disabled, and so forth. A further theme is the possible irrelevance or obsolescence of certain social institutions and the need to supplement or replace them. This is expressed, for example, in the actions of some of the intermediary bodies and in the

FIGURE 4.2

Hypothetical models of intervention in relation to unemployment



field of community businesses, cooperatives, and other novel forms of production organisation. All this takes place against a backdrop of significant government expenditure on MSC programmes to absorb the unemployed, which the voluntary organisations have taken a major role in implementing.

The following typology of responses is derived from the evidence in the literature and is intended to offer a provisional structure for interpreting action with the unemployed. The typology is based on distinctions that may be drawn between different analyses of unemployment as a social problem: that is, it reflects different possible understandings of the causes and effects of unemployment. The classification proposed here therefore embodies, at least in embryo, alternative strategies for dealing with unemployment. The classification is not in essence based on type of organisation or type of activity, although it is perfectly plausible that specific types of organisation or activity might actually reflect different strategies.

The first distinction then is between

- (i) responses aimed at alleviating the harmful consequences of unemployment for individuals; not addressed to reducing unemployment as such, and
- (ii) responses aimed at reducing the occurrence of unemployment. These two broad strategies will be referred to as the welfare and prevention models, respectively.

The two broad strategies may in turn be subdivided. The relationship is shown in Fig. 4.2.

- (iii) The pure welfare model aims simply to provide direct services to the unemployed, such as welfare rights advice, alternative activities, or counselling.
- (iv) The augmented welfare model has somewhat similar basic aims to (iii), but in addition to direct service, favours organised action on issues affecting the unemployed: for example, campaigns on welfare benefits. It may be thought of as having narrow political aims.
- (v) The traditional employment model aims to protect and enhance the availability of conventional employment opportunities within the established sectors of the economy. On this view the best approach to unemployment is simply to create more ordinary jobs.
- (vi) The new work model also seeks to create new jobs, but is not satisfied with traditional definitions of work. Hence there is interest in new organisational structures (especially community businesses) and new philosophies of work - more leisure, job sharing, different patterns of work over the life span, etc. (cf. Handy, 1984). There is

some suggestion here of a broad political movement in infancy.

As with all ideal types, this fourfold classification must be regarded as an approximation to what is likely in reality to be an irregular continuum. It does however have the merit of subsuming all the work reflected in the literature in a comparatively economical way. It is also of interest that the dimension (iii) - (vi) could be said to represent a continuum of political conservatism/radicalism, albeit one which is not accurately reflected in the institutions of British politics.

As explained thus far, the typology constitutes a somewhat hypothetical representation of the field. In the next chapter we shall see to what extent it was verified from the empirical evidence of a survey.

CHAPTER 5

Survey of voluntary sector work with the unemployed in Scotland

5.1 Rationale for survey

The literature on voluntary action and unemployment, of which Chapter 4 is an overview, strongly indicated that there existed a growing, experimental, rapidly developing field of practice. Much of this activity had appeared at the margins of more established fields. Thus the social welfare intermediary bodies were showing signs of taking on unemployment as a major relevant field of work; the trade unions were making efforts of a kind to cater for the unemployed; and in the community business movement it was hoped to harness the productivity of industry and commerce to the benefit of the community. Community work itself has always tended to be a marginal activity for the organisations which host it, as Henderson and Thomas (1980a) have argued. It should not be surprising that the concern with unemployment has also this peripheral quality. Until recent times unemployment has not been an important issue for social welfare organisations in particular or for social policy in general for at least 45 years. In that time the institutions of social welfare, and indeed the society which supports them, have undergone profound changes. For practical purposes therefore, unemployment is a new social welfare problem. Means to tackle it are only just beginning to be worked out.

The broad aims of this research require some basic knowledge of the nature of voluntary sector responses to unemployment as a necessary preliminary to understanding what concepts and ideologies inform those responses and the actions of the practitioners involved. In other words, it was necessary to know what was being done and in what context before attempting an analysis of why practitioners and organisations were behaving as they did. The literature suggested that quite a significant amount might be happening but, as has already been made clear, much of it was exploratory and tentative. The range of activities reported was wide, and many different kinds of organisation were involved. However there was no firm indication on either the extent

of this work, or on what organisations might be undertaking specific varieties of it. This absence of information would make it difficult to pursue a detailed enquiry into the structure and meanings of activities on behalf of the unemployed with any confidence that one was looking at representative examples of the work. It was therefore decided to carry out a short postal survey in order to gain a preliminary overview of what was being done, and by whom.

The aims of the survey were to make an initial appraisal of the nature, scale, location, funding and sponsorship of voluntary sector work with the unemployed, and thence to identify some of the main influences, concerns, directions and issues current in the field. This would provide an information base upon which later sampling decisions for the field studies could be made, having regard to geographical location, type of organisation, different work activities and other important variables. More importantly, by being equipped with some general understanding of prevailing activities and circumstances, the subsequent research on the individual practitioners and their organisations would be more informed, economical and penetrating. Individual practitioners' knowledge and understanding might be better judged against the background of the culture and practice in the selected field as a whole, in order for example to assess it as orthodox, innovatory, typical, etc. Since practitioners commonly inform themselves from formal and informal networks of those involved in similar work, it would be valuable to understand the basic parameters describing the field in general. As previously argued, the researcher's expertise in the field of the subjects is an important contribution to the quality of the findings. The survey was also designed to pick up key issues in the funding and sponsorship of the organisations concerned. These turned out to be major determinants of the direction of practitioners' efforts.

The survey was addressed to all known relevant voluntary organisations in Scotland. Scotland was chosen as the field of enquiry for a number of reasons. The available information suggested that this plan would yield information on a large enough number of initiatives to enable a reasonable sample to be selected for more detailed study at a later stage, while still remaining within manageable numbers and a reasonable geographical distance. Secondly, Scotland is recognised for (among other things) its distinctive political and legal traditions, and has correspondingly distinctive institutions relevant to the present field of study: these include the STUC, social work and community education departments of local authorities, various Scottish intermediary bodies, etc. Thirdly, it was considered there would be some intrinsic interest in a 'snapshot' of Scottish initiatives in order to promote a better informed debate on future

policy and practice in what is undoubtedly an important and growing field.

The survey was planned during the latter part of 1984 and carried out during March-May 1985. Fortuitously, during these months three directories (BURN, 1984; CBS, 1984; SCSS, 1984) and one descriptive study (CEI, 1984) were published which were directly relevant to voluntary sector work with the unemployed. This gave rise to the rather unusual opportunity of carrying out a postal survey on the basis of newly compiled directory information in a field which is rapidly changing and difficult to classify. It was therefore possible to aim for a relatively complete snapshot of the situation in Scotland at that time.

5.2 The study population

5.2.1 General considerations

As already explained, the survey covered voluntary sector organisations in Scotland believed to be concerned with unemployment. The voluntary sector is notoriously resistant to tidy academic classification (e.g. Johnson, 1981; Wolfenden, 1978). Since a key role of the voluntary sector is taken to be innovation away from the mainstream of social intervention, this untidiness is not only to be expected but could be seen as a sign of health and vigour. However some form of classification is clearly essential if the portrait to be compiled is to advance beyond an undifferentiated catalogue, and provide even a basic level of analysis. The classification scheme of types of organisation adopted for the survey was derived from the study of the literature and inspection of the schemes listed in the directories. It must immediately be said however that the classification could only be regarded as temporary at the point when the survey was carried out. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the available general descriptive information about the various kinds of schemes was too fragmentary for any definitive system of categories to be created. Secondly, the very novelty of many schemes meant that their originators were themselves likely to be unclear about their activities in respect of some of the dimensions which suggest themselves as possibly valuable for classification purposes. For example, unemployed workers' centres are sometimes ambivalent about whether their main focus should be on helping unemployed individuals or on attacking the system that creates unemployment. A corollary of these arguments is that it was frequently difficult to classify individual organisations with any degree of confidence.

TABLE 5.1

**Organisations concerned with unemployment and located in Scotland,
listed in BURN directory (BURN, 1984)**

Type	No. listed
Unemployed workers' centres	60
Community business or local enterprise trust	25
Combination of above two, or unclassifiable	18

TABLE 5.2

**Community development organisations in Scotland and their concern
with unemployment, listed in SCSS directory (SCSS, 1984)**

Type	Number listed	Number which include employment, unemployment or community business in self- description
council for voluntary service	41	3
volunteer bureaux or exchange	11	5
fed. of community halls	6	0
local resource centre	10	3
others	13	3

The classification adopted for the purposes of defining the population and initial analysis was essentially naturalistic: organisations were classified according to the kind of labels they gave themselves. The scheme which was finally adopted, and which appears in Table 5.8, was not concluded until the questionnaires had been examined, in order to allow for the possibility of previously unrecognised types or even a totally reorganised system. In the event the major categories were as anticipated in Tables 5.1 and 5.2. The result is a rough guide to the field but should not, of course, be taken as representing a classification of the actions carried out or of the thinking and ideology which inspires those actions. Indeed, as will already be apparent, one of the key aims of the survey was precisely to explore the relationship between organisation type, according to the criteria adopted here, and activities carried out.

5.2.2 Assembling the survey population

Three main sources were used to compile the survey population.

- (i) The BURN directory 'Action with the unemployed' (BURN, 1984) yielded two main types: the unemployed workers' centre and the community business and/or local enterprise trust. By definition, all the bodies listed in this directory were presumed to be concerned with unemployment. Table 5.1 summarises the listing. All the organisations were included in the survey.
- (ii) The SCSS directory (SCSS, 1984) lists various types of 'community development' organisation, not all of which are necessarily concerned with unemployment. Table 5.2 summarises the contents. On the indications of interest in unemployment from this directory, it was decided to include all the bodies listed. The federations of community halls were subsequently excluded in the light of a uniformly negative, and apparently coordinated, response from this group.
- (iii) The third directory, published by Community Business Scotland (CBS, 1984), listed 44 established or nascent community businesses in Scotland, of which 13 were also listed in the BURN directory. All were included in the survey population.

There were several subsidiary sources of information on relevant bodies. Volunteer Development Scotland supplied an up to date list of volunteer bureaux, generally confirming but somewhat amending the SCSS directory. Personal information added a handful of cases. More importantly, in an attempt to achieve a comprehensive coverage of Scotland, respondents were asked to list any local organisations they knew of which

TABLE 5.3

Organisations excluded from survey

Organisation type	Reason for exclusion
Grant making charitable trusts	Main role is funding initiatives of other organisations - not involved in direct practice re unemployment
Local authority community education services	(a) Local authorities not in voluntary sector (b) Community and adult education distinguished here from voluntary social action (but there exist affinities with community work)
WEA	See (b) above
Regional or Scottish intermediary bodies, specialist and generalist	Survey not designed to explore their role
Educational institutions	Not in voluntary sector
Welfare rights and general advisory services	Not specifically concerned with unemployment
General youth work	Unemployment affects all youth work to some extent; interest reserved for specialist youth unemployment projects
MSC schemes, with some exceptions	Such schemes generally aimed to complement normal activities of organisation. YTS is a training scheme. Projects included where directly addressed to unemployment as in unemployed workers' centres, etc.

carried out the activities referred to in the questionnaire. This produced quite a volume of responses. Many of the bodies so mentioned had already been included, but a further 37 members were added to the survey population as a result of respondents' information.

5.2.3 Exclusions

Concern about the effects of unemployment is not of course confined to voluntary organisations of the types included above; so widespread is the problem that it impinges on the whole range of social welfare organisations in the broadest sense. The decisions about which organisations to exclude are therefore of some significance. Table 5.3 lists the more important exclusions, with notes on the reason for exclusion. The general principles adopted were to exclude: local authority provision; services which get involved with unemployment incidentally, rather than define unemployment as the central issue; bodies not directly involved with unemployment.

5.2.4 The final population

The total number of organisations identified by these means came to 264. The respondents' replies and other sources of information showed that an appreciable number of those originally included fell within the excluded categories mentioned above. The final figure for valid members of the survey population, after removing anomalies, was 200. The details are given in Table 5.4.

5.3 Design and implementation of questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to gather preliminary information in two main areas: (i) location, structure, funding and staffing of the respondent organisations (ii) activities carried out in relation to the unemployed or unemployment, with some indication of priorities. In order to fulfil the intention of sketching a broad outline of the field, it was desirable to aim for a good response rate and the questionnaire was therefore kept as short and simple as possible. A pilot version was mailed, with a covering letter, to a few organisations of the same type in England. The pilot received a response of 9 out of 13 and indicated that, with one or two minor amendments, the questionnaire would

TABLE 5.4

Total survey population, number of responses, and analysis of anomalies

	subtotals	total
Valid members		
reply received . . .	126	
no reply	74	200
Invalid members		
non-relevant organisation-		
reply received . .	38	
*non-relevant organisation-		
no reply	14	
gone away/cannot trace,		
etc.	9	
duplicates	3	64
Total		264

Net response rate for valid members = $126/200 = 63\%$

*Note: since the assignment of members to this category is based on minimal information, there is a fair chance of error here. However, the impact of any mis-assignments on the overall picture is small as this category amounts to only 5% of the total.

SURVEY OF WORK WITH UNEMPLOYED

Name of group or organisation

Address

Phone no.

Usual hours of opening

1. What geographical area do you aim to cover?

2. When did your organisation start working?

3.

(a) Does your organisation include representatives of any other bodies (such as trade union, local authority, voluntary organisation)? Please list:
.....

(b) Does your organisation receive financial support or sponsorship from any other body? Please list:

4. The list on the next page shows a number of activities which are sometimes undertaken with or on behalf of unemployed people, or in connection with unemployment as a general issue. Please indicate with a tick [✓] any of these which your organisation is now involved in. Put a double tick [✓✓] against any which you see as vitally important to your organisation's work. Put a cross [X] against any activities which you think are definitely not appropriate to your organisation. Leave the rest of the boxes blank.

- [] individual welfare benefits advice
- [] drop-in social or recreational activities (such as games, cafe)
- [] organised sports
- [] personal advice and counselling for unemployed people
- [] opportunities to practise skills and crafts (such as woodwork, printing) - please list:
.....
- [] training courses - state subjects:
- [] trying to obtain concessions for unemployed people (e.g. public transport, admission charges)
- [] publish newspaper - please attach sample
- [] organised action on general welfare benefits issues
- [] defending job opportunities in your area
- [] campaigns or projects to create new jobs
- [] helping unemployed people to create own job or set up own business
- [] joint work with local community organisations (e.g. tenants' associations) on unemployment issues
- [] joint work with trade unions on unemployment issues
- [] promoting meetings and discussions to explore new ideas about work and employment
- [] others - please list:
.....

5. Does your organisation have any paid staff who are specifically concerned with work with the unemployed? YES/NO

If yes, how many full time

part time

6. Does your organisation operate any MSC schemes? YES/NO

If yes, please list:

type of scheme (CP, YTS etc)

no. of employees- full time part time

type of work

If possible, please enclose a statement of aims and/or constitution; also any relevant literature (such as leaflets, reports) which describes your work.

Please attach names and addresses of any other local organisations you know of which do any of the things listed in question 4.

Covering letter

6653

27 March 1985

Dear Friend,

Survey of work with unemployed

I am making a study of organisations and groups in Scotland which work with unemployed people. This important field is developing rapidly in response to unprecedented levels of unemployment.

I would be most grateful if you could let me have some basic information about what your organisation does. I enclose a short questionnaire which covers the information I would like to collect at this stage. Your cooperation in filling it up and returning it to me would be much appreciated.

Because it is not always possible to get a complete picture from a questionnaire, it would also be helpful to receive copies of any literature, such as leaflets, reports etc which may be relevant.

I expect to publish the results of the survey in due course, and I would hope that the resulting picture of voluntary action with the unemployed will be useful to all those working in the field.

I would of course be pleased to provide further information or discuss the questionnaire with you. I look forward to hearing from you, and enclose a stamped addressed envelope for your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Clark
Lecturer

elicit the information required. The final version is given in Annex 5.5.

The main body of the questionnaire relates to activities carried out, and this merits some explanation. The list was derived from a comprehensive study of the literature previously discussed and was intended to be, as far as practicable, exhaustive of work with the unemployed or on unemployment. In this respect the list appears to have been successful in that no significant and relevant activity was mentioned with any regularity under the open 'others' heading. It will be evident that the list represents activities which could be analysed or grouped in a number of ways, and this is discussed below.

The bulk of the questionnaires was mailed at the end of March 1985 with a covering letter (Annex 5.6), and stamped addressed envelope. A follow-up mailing was made two months later to non-respondents (Annex 5.7), and at the same time to the 37 new names added as a result of respondents' information in the first round.

The response achieved is shown in Table 5.8. The overall net response rate was 63%. It should be noted however that this figure masks an important variation in response rate by type of organisation. Unemployed workers' centres and community businesses achieved 45% and 46% respectively, whereas the response rate for all other types of organisation combined was 83%. In the case of community businesses the low response rate may well be attributable to the fact that about half those included in the survey population were listed as under development rather than actually functioning. The low response rate for unemployed workers' centres is less easy to account for, but it is worth remarking that the total population of 47 is much higher than the 23 or so reported in previous surveys (cf. section 4.3.6). It is also noteworthy that the unemployed workers' centres and community businesses are very much newer established than the other two main groups, the councils for voluntary service and the volunteer bureaux. It would not be unexpected if the newer organisations were less able to cope with answering even a short questionnaire, partly for reasons of resources and partly perhaps because they were less clear on their position regarding the various matters dealt with in the questionnaire.

Respondents were also asked to include any relevant literature, such as constitution, leaflets, reports etc. This yielded a substantial volume of material, and in some cases there were quite full letters of amplification as well. In general this material served to confirm the picture already built up in the previous chapter. In a number of cases

Follow up letter

25 May 1985

Dear Friend,

Survey of work with unemployed

You may remember that a couple of months ago I sent you a questionnaire asking for some information about any work your organisation does with unemployed people. Since that time I have received full and most interesting replies from the majority of the groups I wrote to, and this is enabling me to build up a good picture of voluntary action with the unemployed in Scotland.

I have not received a reply from you so far, and I would appreciate it greatly if you could take a few minutes now to return the form. I enclose another copy for your convenience. From the point of view of the research, it is equally important of course to have your replies regardless of whether they are positive or negative. Please let me know if there is any other information you require.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Clark
Lecturer

P.S. If by any chance this letter has crossed with your reply, please ignore it.

TABLE 5.8

Response of valid members by type of organisation

	Organisation type:									TOTALS
	CB	UWC	CVS	VB	ARC	Y	O	CO	UNID.	
response N	24	21	32	15	12	8	8	6		126
non response N	28	26	6	4	2	2	1	1	4	74
total N*	52	47	38	19	14	10	9	7	4	200
org. type as % of pop.	26	23	19	9	7	5	4	3	2	(100)~
% response by org. type	46	45	84	79	86	80	89	86		63

* excluding unidentifiable non-respondents

~ figures in this row rounded to nearest 1%

Key to organisation type:

CB = community business or local enterprise trust

UWC = unemployed workers' centre

CVS = council for voluntary service

VB = volunteer bureau

ARC = area resource centre

Y = youth unemployment project

O = other

CO = community organisation linked

UNID = unidentifiable

TABLE 5.9

Organisation type x time established at 1.5.85

Shown thus: N

col %

	Organisation type:								TOTALS
	CB	UWC	CVS	VB	ARC	Y	O	CO	
up to 1 yr	5 20.8	5 23.8	0 0	4 26.7	1 8.3	1 12.5	0 0	1 16.7	17 13.6
2-3 yrs	12 50	10 47.6	5 16.1	4 26.7	4 33.3	5 62.5	4 50	2 33.3	46 36.8
4-6 yrs	5 20.8	6 28.6	3 9.7	4 26.7	6 50	2 25	4 50	3 50	33 26.4
over 6 yrs	2 8.3	0 0	23 74.2	3 20	1 8.3	0 0	0 0	0 0	29 23.2
TOTAL	24 19.2	21 16.8	31 24.8	15 12.0	12 9.6	8 6.4	8 6.4	6 4.8	125 100

substantial local information was provided.

5.4 Profile of the organisations

Questions 2,3,5,6 of the questionnaire were designed to collect some basic information about the age, size, composition and membership of the respondent organisations. Within the confines of a short design it was clear that only a sketchy outline would be possible. Nevertheless some useful findings were gained from this part.

5.4.1 Age of the organisations

The breakdown of age by organisation type is shown in Table 5.9. The main observations here are that community businesses are young organisations: 71% were less than 3 years old. Much the same is true of unemployed workers' centres, of which again 71% were less than 3 years old. On the other hand the councils for voluntary service were longer established - 74% over 6 years.

5.4.2 Representatives of other organisations

Eighteen different kinds of organisation were mentioned by respondents as being represented on their own organisation. However, of these only 7 types were mentioned by more than 10% of respondents. The breakdown by organisation type is shown in Table 5.10. The most important organisations which supply representatives are clearly the district and regional councils, particularly the latter. In the case of unemployed workers' centres the trades unions provide a major constituency, as would be expected from the fact that the unions have been the main initiators of such centres. The councils for voluntary service draw heavily from local voluntary organisations, as again is to be expected from the nature of their constitutions.

5.4.3 Funding bodies

A somewhat similar pattern emerges with respect to funding bodies as does with regard to organisations supplying representatives. Seventeen different funding sources were

TABLE 5.10

Organisation type x bodies supplying representatives

Shown thus: N

	% of org. type		Organisation type:						TOTALS
	CB	UWC	CVS	VB	ARC	Y	O	CO	
district council	6 25	11 52.4	10 31.3	0 0	5 41.7	1 12.5	0 0	1 16.7	34 27
regional council	10 41.7	11 52.4	18 56.3	6 40	7 58.3	5 62.5	3 37.5	1 16.7	61 48.4
loc. auth. unsp.	3 12.5	3 14.3	6 18.8	2 13.3	0 0	1 12.5	3 37.5	0 0	18 14.3
comm. council	3 12.5	3 14.3	9 28.1	0 0	3 25	1 12.5	1 12.5	0 0	20 15.9
trade unions	1 4.2	15 71.4	8 25	1 6.7	1 8.3	0 0	2 25	0 0	28 22.2
vol. orgs.	3 12.5	2 9.5	31 96.9	6 40	4 33.3	0 0	1 12.5	1 16.7	48 38.1
churches	2 8.3	5 23.8	7 21.9	0 0	0 0	0 0	2 25	1 16.7	17 13.5
local comm. org.	2 8.3	1 4.8	7 21.9	0 0	5 41.7	0 0	0 0	1 16.7	16 12.7

TABLE 5.11

Organisation type x funding sources

Shown thus: N

	% of org. type		Organisation type:						TOTALS
	CB	UWC	CVS	VB	ARC	Y	O	CO	
district council	6 25	8 38.1	10 31.3	2 13.3	3 25	2 25	1 12.5	0 0	32 25.4
regional council	3 12.5	7 33.3	22 68.8	2 13.3	5 41.7	2 25	3 37.5	1 16.7	45 35.7
SWSG(1)	0	0	24	1	3	0	1	0	29
-	0	0	75	6.7	25	0	12.5	0	23
MSC(2)	3	9	1	8	6	2	1	0	30
-	12.5	42.9	3.1	53.3	50	25	12.5	0	23.8
urban aid	9	4	1	0	5	3	2	1	25
-	37.5	19	3.1	0	41.7	37.5	25	16.7	19.8
trusts	2	0	7	4	0	4	4	2	23
-	8.3	0	21.9	26.7	0	50	50	33.3	18.3

(1) Social Work Services Group

(2) Manpower Service Commission

mentioned but of these only 6 were named by more than 10% of respondents. The breakdown of funding sources by organisation type is shown in Table 5.11. In general funding is fairly evenly spread by source and recipient organisations. However, the councils for voluntary service are particularly reliant on SWSG and regional council funding: this is entirely to be expected from the nature of the institutionalised funding arrangements. The MSC is particularly important for unemployed workers' centres, accounting for the fears of curtailment of 'political' activities noted in Chapter 4. It is interesting that the main newly established groups, the community businesses and the unemployed workers' centres, are reliant on a diversity of funding sources.

5.4.4 Staffing

Respondents were asked to give the number of full time and part time staff working in their organisation. The replies should be treated with some caution since it became clear that the questionnaire did not reliably distinguish between ordinary paid staff and workers on MSC schemes attached to the organisation. Nevertheless the clear picture emerges of predominantly very small paid staffs. Of the respondent organisations 52% had no full time staff, 23% had one and 11% had two. Likewise 85% of respondent organisations had either none or one part time staff. No significant differences between types of organisation emerged.

5.4.5 MSC schemes

Some 32% of respondents were involved in running Community Programme schemes. The vast majority of the schemes were small, employing fewer than five full time and five part time staff. There were no marked variations by organisation type except that the community businesses had a fairly low level of involvement, which is somewhat unexpected.

Very few respondents (about 5%) were involved in YTS schemes, and around 3% ran VPP schemes.

TABLE 5.12

Prevalence of activities

Activity	Variable name	% respondents ans. positively*	rank order
personal advice and counselling	COUNS	60	1=
helping unemployed people create own job or business	OWNJOBS	60	1=
joint work with local community orgs.	JOINTCO	60	1=
campaigns or projects to create new jobs	NEWJOBS	57	4=
promoting discussions on new ideas about work and employment	IDEAS	57	4=
opportunities for skills and crafts	CRAFTUN	56	6
welfare benefits advice	WBEN	54	7=
training courses	TRAINUN	54	7=
defending job opportunities	JOBOPPS	39	9
drop-in rec. activities	DROP	37	10
organised action on welfare benefits issues	WELFACT	35	11
publish newspaper	NEWSP	33	12
seeking concessions	CONCS	29	13=
joint work with trade uns.	JOINTTU	29	13=
organised sports	SPORT	28	15

* 'Positively' means scores of 3 and 4 combined.

5.5 Activities of the organisations and models of intervention

It has already been mentioned that the body of the questionnaire, Question 4, was designed to gather information about the prevalence and importance of various activities on behalf of the unemployed. The list of activities was arrived at from a study of the literature, as explained above. Respondents were asked to indicate whether their organisation was involved in the activity on a four point scale, as follows:-

	coding for analysis purposes
X= definitely not appropriate to your organisation	1
blank = neutral	2
/ = activity your organisation is now involved in	3
// = vitally important to your organisation's work	4

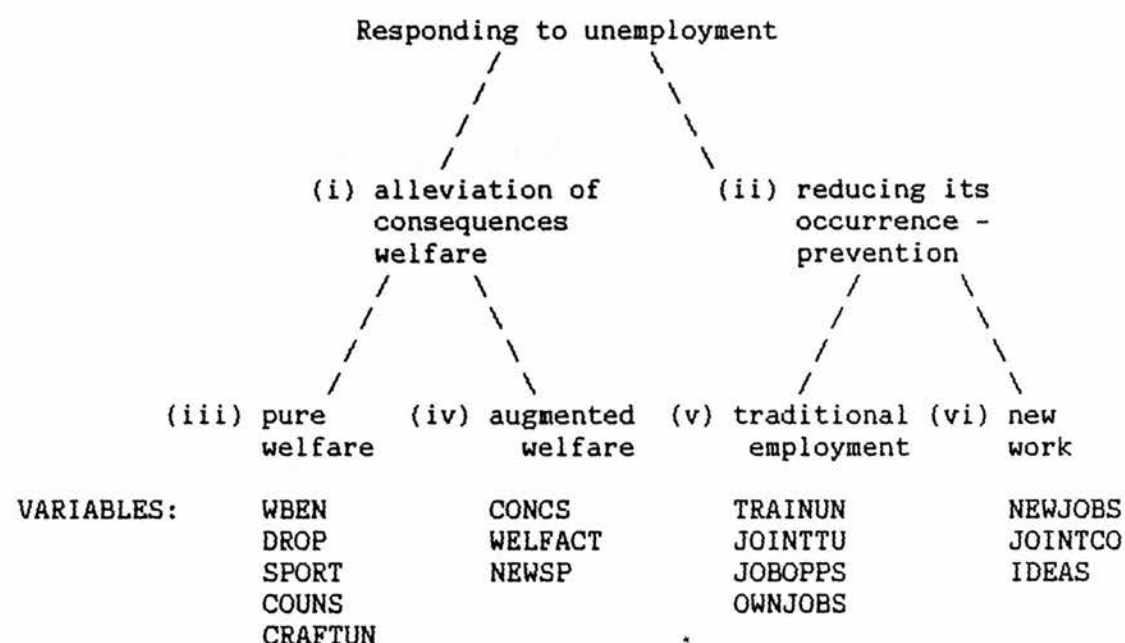
Scoring was well distributed over the range; for many of the activities around a quarter of the population fell into each scoring category.

An overall idea of the prevalence of the activities may be gained from Table 5.12. Taking the responses coded 3 and 4 (above) together as positive responses, it will be seen that in general positive responses in respect of each of the activities were given by between nearly one-third and nearly two-thirds of respondents. There was little difference in the popularity of the eight most popular activities. All activities scored at least 25% positive responses. This confirms that the activities identified from the literature are all widely considered important.

Detailed crosstabulations were prepared by each organisation type for each of the 15 activities variables. For this purpose organisation type was treated as the independent variable and activity as the dependent variable. In order to reduce the volume of material to manageable and comprehensible proportions, recourse will now be had to the typology of interventions proposed in section 4.4.

FIGURE 5.13

Hypothetical models of intervention in relation to unemployment with survey variables



For key to variable names, see Table 5.12.

FIGURE 5.14

Illustration of use of crosstabulated gamma statistics

Activity variables					
	A	B	C	D	E
A					
B					
C		H			
D		H	H		
E		H	H	H	

H = high gamma for crosstabulated variables
blank = low gamma

In this example, variables B,C,D,E are seen to be highly associated with each other. If listed sequentially on the table they will form a block on the table.

In the analysis of the questionnaire, each model of intervention was considered to be associated with a number of the activities already discussed. Each activity was treated as belonging uniquely to one model. Thus, for example, welfare benefits advice was regarded as indicative of what in section 4.4 was identified as the pure welfare model. Figure 5.13 reproduces part of Fig. 4.2, and in addition shows how the activity variables were associated with the models of intervention.

The hypothesis which informs this analysis is as follows. If the various activities are indeed derivations from one or other model of intervention, it would be expected that the various activities linked with each particular model would be highly associated with each other. Thus, in Fig. 5.13, the five variables WBEN, DROP, SPORT, COUNS, CRAFTUN would together tend to score highly in respect of organisations employing a pure welfare model. The question now is to assess whether the data support this supposition.

The relationship of the various activities to each other was explored by means of the gamma statistic. This measures the proportional reduction in error to be gained in the prediction of one variable by reference to another (Mendenhall et al., 1974). It is applicable to ordinal-level measurement and takes values between -1 and 1. As the data were well distributed over a four-point ordinal scale it was considered that this would be an appropriate means of measuring any tendency for one activity variable to score high or low along with another activity variable.

If the various activities do tend to be associated with each other, this will be shown up by a crosstabulation of the gamma statistic. This is shown diagrammatically in Fig 5.14.

Table 5.15 combines the foregoing arguments and applies them to the analysis of the data. From section 4.4, four models were postulated involving respectively 5,3,4 and 3 variables. If the hypothesis of four models entailing these variables is to be supported, Table 5.15 would show up four corresponding blocks of high gamma scores.

It will be seen from Table 5.15 that there is no clear evidence for the existence of four distinct models. However, there is good support for a slightly modified hypothesis. If the four models of section 4.4 are reduced to two groups - the welfare and the prevention models - the import of Table 5.15 is that there is strong support for the existence of a prevention model comprising the variables listed in Table 5.16. Similarly,

TABLE 5.15

Gamma for two-way constabulations

Shown thus: gamma > 0.4 in plain figures; gamma > 0.25 but < 0.4 in brackets;
gamma < 0.25 blank.

	WREN	DROP	SPORT	COUNS	CRAFTUN	COMCS	WELFACT	NEWSP	TRAINUN	JOINTTU	JOBOPPS	OWNJOBS	NEWJOBS	JOINTCO	IDEAS
WREN															
DROP	(.29)														
SPORT	.41	.62													
COUNS	.67	(.25)	(.26)												
CRAFTUN		(.26)													
COMCS	.52	.46	.46	.46											
WELFACT	.63	(.26)		.40	(-.23)	.66									
NEWSP	(.28)	(.31)	(.35)	(.25)		.48	(.39)								
TRAINUN	(.26)			.45	(.27)										
JOINTTU				(.27)		(.33)	(.36)	.27							
JOBOPPS	(.31)					.41	.49	(.39)	.49						
OWNJOBS				(.27)	.42			.50	.54						
NEWJOBS								.53	.42	.64	.53				
JOINTCO	(.32)			.42		.37	.41	(.32)	.52	.71	.59	.41	.51		
IDEAS				(.25)		(.25)	(.26)	.52	(.37)	.63	.61	.61	.64		

For key to variable names, see Table 5.12.

Hypothetical models (numbered as in Fig. 5.13):

- (iii) pure welfare model comprising WREN, DROP, SPORT, COUNS, CRAFTUN
- (iv) augmented welfare model comprising COMCS, WELFACT, NEWSP
- (v) traditional employment model comprising TRAINUN, JOINTTU, JOBOPPS, OWNJOBS
- (vi) new work model comprising NEWJOBS, JOINTCO, IDEAS

TABLE 5.16

Activities x model of intervention

Welfare model:	WBEN
	DROP
	SPORT
	COUNS
	CONCS
	WELFACT
	NEWSP
Prevention model:	TRAINUN
	JOINTTU
	JOBOPPS
	OWNJOBS
	NEWJOBS
	JOINTCO
	IDEAS

For key to variable names, see Table 5.12.

TABLE 5.17

Organisation type x percent positive scores for activitiesWelfare model:

	CB	UWC	CVS	VB	ARC	Y	O	CO
WBEN	25	81	44	40	83	62	75	67
DROP	12	76	19	13	42	75	50	67
SPORT	12	67	9	7	42	75	12	33
COUNS	50	90	37	60	58	75	87	67
CONCS	8	67	19	13	25	50	50	33
WELFACT	17	17	44	7	42	25	62	0
NEWSP	25	38	34	13	50	50	37	17

Prevention model:

TRAINUN	67	52	37	60	58	50	75	50
JOINTTU	21	67	22	20	33	0	25	33
JOBOPPS	42	57	47	13	42	25	25	17
OWNJOBS	92	62	43	20	58	62	62	100
NEWJOBS	71	52	69	20	67	25	50	83
JOINTCO	75	71	50	33	83	62	50	33
IDEAS	71	52	56	27	58	50	87	67

Notes: For key to organisation type, refer to Table 5.8.
 For key to activity variables, refer to Table 5.12.

if the variable CRAFTUN (opportunities for practising skills and crafts) is excluded, there is fair support for the existence of a welfare model comprising the other variables also listed in Table 5.16.

We may now proceed to examine the tendency for organisations of a given type to be involved in particular activities or to adopt one or other model of intervention. In Table 5.17 positive responses (i.e. scores of 3 and 4 combined) are shown for each variable and organisation type, where the variables are grouped into the two models the existence of which is supported from the previous analysis.

Table 5.18 represents an attempt to indicate how active the various organisation types are within the two models. The following conclusions may be drawn. (i) Community businesses are strongly involved in the prevention model, as indeed is to be expected. They are markedly unenthusiastic about the welfare model and the contrast is very distinct. (ii) Unemployed workers' centres appear to be almost equally involved in the welfare and prevention models. The ambivalence over this has already been commented on elsewhere. (iii) The councils for voluntary service have by comparison only a rather low level of involvement in work with the unemployed. This is quite significant in view of the emphasis being given to the subject by the national intermediary bodies. As previously suggested, the national bodies seem to be attempting to lead where the local bodies are generally still reluctant to follow. (iv) The volunteer bureaux also have a relatively low level of involvement with the unemployed. Numbers of respondents commented to this effect in their replies. This finding is of some interest given the high priority attached in some quarters to making voluntary work available to the unemployed, and the unemployed available to potential recipients of their voluntary work. (v) The remaining three organisation types each comprised less than 10% of respondents (i.e. less than 12 each) and generalisations on these small groups would be rather risky, especially as there is considerable variety within the three groups. Here it would be advisable to look for further qualitative data.

5.6 Evaluation: limitations of data and strength of conclusions

It would evidently be unwise to take too literally the figures presented in the foregoing analysis. The method of data collection carries a definite risk of unreliability. There is no standard definition of the various activities referred to in Question 4; respondents were left to make their own interpretation of what was meant, and there is no

TABLE 5.18

Organisation type x average percent positive score

Organisation type	Average % positive score:		Rank order:	
	welfare	prevention	welfare	prevention
CB	21	63	8	1
UWC	69	59	1	2
CVS	29	46	6	6
VB	22	28	7	8
ARC	49	57	4	3
Y	59	39	2	7
O	53	53	3	5
CO	41	55	5	4

For key to organisation type, refer to Table 5.8.

'Average percent positive score' represents average of positive scores, by model, as shown in Table 5.17.

independent check on this aspect. The risk is enhanced by the novelty and fluidity of the field. However, it is considered that the questions remain sufficiently close to plain language and a commonsense understanding to serve as an appropriate means of gaining a first description. A further caution must be entered on account of the relatively low response rate from the community businesses and unemployed workers' centres (45% and 46% respectively). What the survey has achieved is an outline picture of activity in the chosen field. It confirms what might be supposed from a reading of the largely ad-hoc descriptive literature. Further, the evidence from the survey and the literature for the existence of two distinctive models of intervention can now be summed up as strongly suggestive, though not conclusive. What emerges is two recognisable tendencies which, while being neither all embracing or mutually exclusive, express themselves in different methods of work.

CHAPTER 6

Field studies: tools and methods

6.1 Operational constructs

In Chapter 3 it was proposed that any account of a practitioner's model for practice would need at least to include his epistemological assumptions, moral and political values, social science knowledge and definitions of social problems. These matters were related to the practitioner's actions in the preliminary version of the action model. However, it was also shown that asking practitioners directly to explain their theoretical position cannot be relied upon to lead to a satisfactory account. The problem here therefore was to find a means of gaining access to respondents' ideas, knowledge, conceptions and values, which they would not necessarily be able to explicate coherently in response to direct questioning.

It was decided to approach this problem by devising a set of operational constructs, whose basic form will be defined in the following paragraphs and whose content will be developed in subsequent sections of this chapter. The operational constructs comprised general categories under which a practitioner's work or an agency's activities might be described. The initial set of operational constructs was generated by reference to the literature and lore of community work and allied practice and it was informed by the results of the survey detailed in Chapter 5. It was to be continually modified and refined in the light of experience, in keeping with the methodology discussed in Chapter 3.

In devising a set of operational constructs, it was intended that they should be as transparent or self-evident as possible, and that they should have ample heuristic value. The constructs were intended to be readily intelligible and to correspond with practitioners' commonsense understanding of practice; to follow and reflect the everyday conceptualisations of both the researcher and subjects. They might therefore form the direct basis for interviews, observation and other methods of field data collection. By contrast, the elements of the action model are inevitably somewhat arcane. I have shown in particular that the central element of the action model, namely the model for

TABLE 6.1

Operational constructs: early exploratory outline

About the work of organisations/practitioners:

ARP Activities, routines, practices
PR Plans and programmes
N Needs of user groups

About the organisations as such:

OR Origins of and rationale for organisation
R Resources
SPI Structures of power and influence
S Satisfaction of users

About the practitioners:

PAM Personal attitudes and moral values
POL Political views
SI Analysis of social issues

practice, is not a standardised or widely used concept. It follows that the conceptual categories to be employed in the eventual analysis of practitioners' action might well depart from the operational constructs.

It is necessary to recognise a number of potential problems which may arise in using a set of operational constructs devised in this way.

(i) Imprecision: a set of categories may not offer a framework into which all relevant observations can reliably be fitted, owing to an insufficiently precise definition of what are and are not relevant data to the category. This is a problem which affects all research and while it cannot be completely eliminated in any open-ended design, it can be controlled by careful definition and by checking for internal consistency (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

(ii) Inadvertent omission: relevant data may not be noted if the researcher's categories do not invite their collection. It generally cannot be proved at the outset that any given set of categories will be adequate to the task in hand, because the possibility of unexpected but nonetheless relevant data categories can never be definitively excluded. In the present study the principle adopted was to maintain as far as possible the potential for collecting observations on any presumably relevant aspect of the practitioners and sites irrespective of whether such observations would fit into the current set of categories, and simultaneously to modify the categories as necessary to do justice to observations which seemed potentially important. The working out of this process will be described later.

(iii) Failure of correspondence with the action model: if the empirical component of the research is to illuminate the action model which is the main focus of enquiry, it is necessary to show how the operational constructs, severally and together, are related to the elements of the action model. It has already been suggested that a gap between action model and operational constructs exists because the latter are intended to be self-evident but the former is not. The danger is that the gap becomes unbridgeable. In other words, the problem is one of inference: the data collected and analysed by means of the operational constructs must bear adequately on the action model.

The operational constructs as defined at the outset of the fieldwork are listed in Table 6.1. They were deliberately drawn at this stage in a fairly provisional way in order to ensure the maintenance of flexibility and openness to unanticipated factors while entering a largely uncharted area, and to allow for any omissions to be repaired easily.

It was also intended to foster continuing interplay with the action model, which was to be continually developed throughout the fieldwork process. Bearing in mind then the tentative and intentionally provisional character of this early formulation of the operational constructs, the remainder of this section will give some indication of the rationale behind the bare outline of the list in Table 6.1. More extended illustrated definitions will be given in section 6.5 below of the operational constructs as they had evolved by a later stage, and were used in the main body of the fieldwork.

Broadly speaking the original operational constructs were based on the assumptions that to understand the actions of practitioners in the chosen field and to illuminate the action model, one would need to gather information systematically covering at least: the nature of the work done and the problems to which it was addressed, the context in which it was carried on, and the beliefs, opinions, values and other attributes of the practitioner which could have relevance for understanding why the processes were as observed. This reflects the general orientation of the action model and indeed the common sense of practice. Within it, three general headings suggested themselves.

The survey reported in Chapter 5, and the literature on voluntary action on unemployment reviewed in Chapter 4, showed that the organisations in this field carried on a range of identifiable activities on either a regular or an occasional basis. To understand practitioners' actions it would plainly be necessary to record and interpret the regular practices of service delivery and organisational maintenance which constitute the most obvious manifestation of the practitioners' work and the agencies' existence. The category ARP - activities, routines and practices - covers these activities. 'Routines' was used to connote those customary practices which were more explicitly set up and recognised, while 'practices' connotes the more implicitly defined ways of doing things which grow up in any organisation: this distinction is frequently just a matter of emphasis. Further, to take into account that organisations and practitioners tend to adopt more or less explicit and structured intentions for the future, the category PR - for plans and programmes - was added as a complement. Finally, to complete the description of the work, the category N for the needs of unemployed people was included. This was on the basis that the intentions of the practitioners and the organisations were presumably to alleviate these needs.

A second group of categories was focused on the functioning of the subject organisations as such, which would be expected to both reflect and condition the activities and intentions of the practitioners. The origins and rationale - OR - of each

TABLE 6.2

Operational constructs x data collection methods: exploratory grid

CONSTRUCTS METHODS	ARP Activities Routines Practices	N Needs of unempl.	OR Origins Rationale	PAM Personal Attitudes Moral values	POL Political views	PR Plans, Programmes	R Resources	S Satisfact. of users	SI Analysis of social issues	SPI Structs. power & influence
Semi-structd. interviews	/		/	/	/	/	/		/	/
Literature, records	/		/			/	/		/	/
Diary exercise	/			/	/	/	/		?	
Direct observation	/			/	/					
Attitude scales				/	/					
Group discussion			/	/	/	/				
Hypothetical/ projective tech.				/	/				/	
Local socio- economic data		/					/			
Schedule interv. of users		/						/		

organisation were expected to be significant, particularly since (as the survey showed) they were overwhelmingly of recent creation; in these circumstances the process of foundation would be so recent as to be a continuing major influence, and many of the original actors would still be involved. The category R, for resources, was adopted to cover the personnel, funding and other prerequisites for practical activity. Thirdly, the category of structures of power and influence - SPI - was adopted to cover the policies and behaviour of formal bodies, such as committees and other agencies, and the powerful individuals, whose actions tended to influence the study organisations and their members. Finally, it was thought that evidence concerning users' satisfaction with the service - S - might shed some interesting light on how the organisations functioned.

The third group of categories relates to the practitioners themselves. PAM, for personal attitudes and moral views, allows for collecting information on an aspect of the practitioner's opinions and values which is universally agreed to be central to welfare practice. It is complemented by POL, for political views. There is no rigid, or perhaps necessary, distinction between these two areas; but it is conventional and possibly useful to follow the classical distinction between ethics and politics in the analysis of social work values (Clark with Asquith, 1985). To these was added the practitioner's analysis of the social issues - SI - which arose in his work. Here the intention was to describe how the practitioner viewed and analysed the social problems, at both individual and societal level, which his work involved him in.

6.2 Methods of data collection: review of options

Alongside the operational constructs, methods of data collection were considered. To explore the possibilities a relatively ample catalogue of methods was compiled, drawing variously from the naturalistic, survey and experimental traditions in social science. Those methods seen as both having some potential applicability to the research questions and being potentially feasible within the resources available were charted on a grid against the operational constructs described in the previous section. The resulting method-topic grid is shown as Table 6.2. Various combinations which appeared immediately to be inappropriate on theoretical grounds, inefficient or impracticable, were shown as null on the grid.

The exercise just described left over 30 method x operational construct possibilities still in the running. Three considerations guided further choice. Firstly, I wished to ensure

a reasonable degree of corroboration or triangulation for the most important operational constructs. This is important because, in a new area where an exploratory approach is indicated, few if any of the recognised methods of social science can be considered comprehensive and reliable enough for one willingly to dispense with corroboration. Indeed, the utility of all the methods in relation to the operational constructs it was hoped they would illuminate, inevitably would remain somewhat conjectural until attempted in practice. There are no proven methods for data collection under many (if not all) of the operational constructs of this research. While corroboration in some areas (such as the content of models for practice) would be afforded by the survey, further reinforcement would not be redundant.

Secondly, it would be important to select methods which would maximise the return of useful data for a given amount of investigation time. A consideration here is that observational methods in general, and traditional anthropological approaches in particular, are notoriously time-consuming.

Thirdly, considerations of acceptability and access would be important. It was known from the survey that the organisations involved are mostly very small, typically with only one or two professional level workers. There would clearly be limits to the toleration of research that could reasonably be expected. Moreover, because of the nature of the material which subjects would be asked to disclose, it would be essential to maintain a relationship of cooperation and confidence. To do this it would be necessary, among other things, for the research to appear intelligible and credible to the subjects; the use of abstruse or overly intrusive methods would risk fatally damaging the researcher's standing. For these reasons, a 'naturalistic' approach would find favour over an 'experimental' one, other things being equal. In the context of the subject agencies it would be impossible to remain invisible, or neglect the impact of the presence of a researcher. In approaching the subjects and conducting my enquiries, I therefore chose to use styles of presentation and behaviour approximating to those of a practitioner, and affected general attitudes similar to those prevalent in the field; this of course depended on my status as 'expert observer'. For purposes of data collection I aimed where possible to use the kinds of activities which are normative in the subject agencies, such as conducting fairly informal interviews, attending meetings, and reading files.

Outline for initial semi-structured interview with service-providing agencies: pilot version

1. Introduction:
 - myself and the research
 - this interview: summary of origins and present work of organisation
 - negotiate further access at end
2. Origins of organisation: historical:
 - when started
 - by whom
 - with what sponsorship or support
 - in response to what event or stimulus
 - with what intentions
3. Aims and objectives: rationale at origin
 - what were/are founders trying to do
 - their understanding of problem addressed
 - how/when did unemployment start to be seen as a relevant problem
4. Overview of present activities (outline only):
 - list in order of time spent
 - identify those specifically relevant to unemployment/the unemployed
5. Personnel:
 - who
 - qualifications/background
 - paid/volunteers
 - which concerned with unemployment
6. Committee and management structure
7. Finance
8. Negotiate further access

6.3 Pilot: implementation

Armed with these thoughts and the method-topic grid (Table 6.2) as a vade mecum, I devised an initial approach for use with the first subject agency. Since I had no prior contact, it seemed probable that the best way to negotiate the kind of intensive access required would be by means of face-to-face interviews so as to establish my identity, intentions and good faith. At the same time it was necessary that the object of my enquiries should, at least in general terms, be comprehensible to the subjects. An initial semi-structured interview was therefore planned in which the main topics would be to collect basic information of a public and non-personal kind about the agency and its work, and secondly to negotiate further access. A question outline for this interview is given in Annex 6.3.

It was known from the survey results that there were four main types of organisation involved in the designated field of voluntary action on unemployment in Scotland, namely unemployed workers' centres, community businesses, volunteer bureaux and councils for voluntary service. It was also known that between them they covered the spectrum of what were identified earlier as 'welfare' and 'prevention' approaches to the problems caused by unemployment. I therefore decided to pursue the detail studies adumbrated in Chapter 3 with agencies drawn from the four groups. It was hoped this would provide a sample both broad enough to test the applicability of the action model in fairly diverse circumstances, yet narrow enough for there to be important areas of comparison or similarity between the different agencies and practitioners.

The choice of site for the pilot was not an insignificant matter. The main consideration was to find an agency which seemed likely to be strongly engaged in relevant work, i.e. to be highly concerned with responses to unemployment informed by ideas of community development. This would provide a better test of the research model and methods than an agency in which involvement with unemployment was seen as marginal. In addition, geographical convenience was important, as the duration of my contact was not easily predictable. Another point was the desirability of avoiding any agencies with which I had previous or continuing contact in a different capacity.

Relevant information on these questions was, of course, readily available from the survey replies. Two agencies, both unemployed workers' centres, seemed to be strong contenders. An initial interview was conducted at the first, from which it was found that the situation there had changed beyond all recognition from the time of the

survey, and it failed on the majority of the criteria mentioned. The second agency however proved to be highly active, and to be led by a practitioner who was articulate, open and even enthusiastic about cooperating in the research. The pilot study therefore proceeded with this second agency.

Contact with the pilot agency took the form of the initial interview just described, followed by some four days spent on the premises, and finishing with a further visit to conduct a final interview. The time apart from the interviews was used for observation; informal discussion with the key worker, colleagues, and users; and studying agency records. In general terms the aim was to acquire such a degree of familiarity with the personnel, structure, practices and tempo of the agency that most of what was observed or spoken about became readily intelligible. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.61) use the analogous concept of 'saturation': 'saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category'. This condition is difficult to define precisely and is admittedly susceptible to bad luck in sampling if it should happen that the events to which the researcher has access are untypical, or major events take place from which the researcher is absent and never hears about. It is similar to the kind of familiarity which every worker must develop in order to feel adequately in command of his situation.

The final stage of fieldwork with the pilot agency comprised another semi-structured interview. This was specifically designed in the light of the observations that had preceded it; it was used to cover outstanding areas of doubt and to pursue vigorously the topics considered important to clarify my understanding of the subject's models for practice. The content was therefore highly focused, while the outward style of the interview continued to be informal and conversational. The interview was tape-recorded so that I could devote full attention to the process of conducting the interview without having simultaneously to make the very detailed record necessary to the subsequent analysis.

The analysis of the pilot study materials proceeded by the conventional means of marking the interview and observation records with codes identical to the operational constructs. The content identified under each code was then collated in a series of fieldnote abstracts on the general basis of one abstract per operational construct.

Various approaches were tried out with the taped record of the final interview. A full transcription including all the pauses, restatements, corrections, etc. proved (as is well

known) to be laborious to produce, and such a fine grain of detailed utterance mostly did not seem germane to the purposes of this research. On the other hand, merely listening to the tape and taking notes did not readily yield the detail which convincingly conveys the speaker's understanding. An intermediate course was eventually selected, whereby a lightly edited transcript was aimed for. This conveys the full verbal content except that the speaker's repetitions, corrections, and slips of the tongue are omitted. Also omitted from the pilot and later transcripts were many of the 'padding' phrases used in ordinary speech, such as 'you know', 'sort of', 'kind of', 'um', 'ah', etc. Dialect usage was mostly rendered in standard English; however, when the speaker noticeably shifted into dialect to denote a different register, e.g. to represent 'common' speech, dialect usage was noted. Also, many dialect speakers tend to move from standard to dialect form under the influence of emotion. These things are, of course, arguably significant in certain respects. However, this research is predominantly concerned with cognitive structures, and the utterances omitted from the transcripts would seem primarily to reflect the work done in articulating ideas or in recalling items from memory, rather than their substance.

6.4 Pilot: methodological conclusions

The substantive results of the pilot study have been incorporated in the general statement of findings, and so will not be presented here. The focus at this point is on the implications of the pilot study for the methods to be used at the subsequent sites.

The method-topic grid (Table 6.2) envisaged a range of possible methods and topics of enquiry (operational constructs). The experience of the pilot led to the final selection of methods and constructs to be used in the main field studies. Of the operational constructs shown in the grid, two were dropped: needs of the target group, and user satisfaction. The first was eliminated because there is already an extensive, and rapidly growing, body of literature and research on the needs of the unemployed. The fieldwork experience echoed what is known from that literature without suggesting that there were any important omissions relevant to my purposes. It seemed reasonable to conclude therefore that there was little to be gained by pursuing this topic.

The topic of user satisfaction was eliminated on the grounds that it seemed to have only peripheral relevance to the research question. Surveys of user satisfaction in social work have to be interpreted with some caution. As a generalisation, users often report they are satisfied with the service they have received even when they got little or no help with their substantive problem. Workers may express satisfaction with the

outcome of their own efforts in the same cases. By contrast, some of the services workers least value giving are those that clients most value receiving (Rees and Wallace, 1978). These and similar findings show that user satisfaction is likely to have only a distant and complicated relationship with workers' models for practice, and to be less useful therefore as an area of data collection for the purposes of this research.

Of the methods displayed in the method-topic grid, the experience of the pilot showed that semi-structured interviews, and observation with greater or lesser degrees of participation, offered the most apt and fruitful methods of data collection. These are indeed well established methods and such a conclusion is not unexpected. It is worth remarking that in the context of the designated field of practice, there are no very profound distinctions between semi-structured interviews, observation and participant observation. Unlike other workplaces where there is a tangible product or a clearly identified clientele with definitely known physical, material, knowledge or emotional needs, the chief activity in the subject agencies is simply talk: the transmission and exchange of ideas, plans, arrangements, suggestions, advice, opportunities, support and friendship, debate, personal hopes, anxieties and inspirations. Thus for the researcher, observation often means chatting, and the content of the chat may be little different from that of an occasion marked as an interview.

Organisational documents, both published and internal, proved at the pilot site to have only limited value, often serving no more than to corroborate or in a minor way amplify verbal accounts. It was decided to scan these rather than attempt any exhaustive analysis of what were often rather skimpy records, of plainly dubious reliability.

Group interviews (Hedges 1985) seemed to be poorly suited to the characteristics of the chosen field. Most of the agencies, as already indicated, only had one or two professional staff; there would therefore be no obvious group with whom it would be practicable to conduct such an exercise. Diary exercises and attitude scales were likewise discarded for similar pragmatic reasons. The experience of the pilot had shown that to do justice to the interviews and observation over even a relatively small sample would require fully all the available time. Diary exercises would require some effort to devise and validate, and therefore seemed uneconomic. Attitude scales, which might offer a good means of mapping respondents' moral and political values, would have required entering a field quite unfamiliar to the researcher, and therefore again seemed uneconomic.

The remaining methods group identified in the grid is the hypothetical exercise or projective technique. In these methods respondents are given a hypothetical situation in some way suggestive or representative of what they do in their ordinary lives and are asked to say how they would respond (Branthwaite and Lunn, 1985). Such methods have been used by research with objectives somewhat akin to those of the present study. For example, in her study of recent ex-students' use of theory, Waterhouse (1985) asked her subjects to say how they would work on a (hypothetical) case presented to them in written summary form. Their responses were used to gauge theoretical knowledge and understanding.

It is possible to envisage two approaches to the use of hypothetical techniques. In the first place, they could have value simply as an interesting stimulus to the subject, leading to the exploration or development of ideas in the context of an interview which might otherwise have been left uncovered. In this approach, the use of a hypothetical technique is simply a heuristic device which it is hoped will lead to suggestive and revealing dialogue. It cannot be assumed, however, that the respondent's behaviour in response to the stimulus is necessarily predictive in any rigorous way of how they would respond in the real situation which the exercise is supposed to evoke, nor that the behaviour would be entirely reliable as a gauge of feelings, attitudes and beliefs.

The second approach, by contrast, supposes that the proposed hypothetical technique can indeed be validated and calibrated so as to become a trustworthy measure of whatever property may be of interest to the research. In this case, it is plainly necessary to have a thorough understanding of the impact of the test on the range of respondents, and to be able to demonstrate the validity and reliability of the test by experimental evidence.

It seems likely that hypothetical techniques may have potential as a means for charting practitioners' knowledge and understanding, and the use of hypothetical case studies is a popular method in both education and research. On the other hand, there is as yet virtually no systematic evidence on the utility or reliability of hypothetical tests as measures of social workers' practical knowledge and understanding. A better general preliminary knowledge of the elements of practitioners' understanding and its relation to their practice seems to be a prerequisite if the use of hypothetical techniques is to be more than a hit or miss affair. It is not known whether practitioners' ability to respond to the challenge of a projective technique is analogous or closely related to their ways of handling real practice. Without further evidence, one should certainly be wary, for example, of drawing conclusions about a practitioner's way of working on the basis

of an exercise resembling a traditional academic essay or exam question. In Chapter 2 it was noted that Argyris and Schön (1977) made a distinction, in the light of their empirical work, between the rationale that practitioners claim for their actions - the 'espoused theory' - and what actually governs their actions - the 'theory-in-use'. It is not for nothing that practical disciplines such as social work, teaching, law, education or medicine invariably require their entrants to demonstrate effectiveness in real practice as well as their ability to handle cognitive exercises.

For the purposes of this research therefore, the potential value of hypothetical techniques would be limited to heuristic purposes; the validation and calibration of rigorous measures was judged to be premature. In practical terms however, there seemed to be little advantage in using a formal hypothetical technique, with its risk of stiltedness and artificiality, over the use of the normal techniques of a probing conversational interview. The latter allows ample opportunity to pose 'what-if' or 'suppose ...' or 'some people think ...' questions, which are hypothetical questions carrying the very substantial advantage that they can be closely related to each respondent's knowledge and awareness. For all these reasons then, formal hypothetical techniques were not used in this study.

One of the outcomes of the pilot study was, therefore, to set the choice of data collection methods. Within the selected methods of interviews, observation and study of agency records, various improvements in the details of design were made as a result of the experience of the pilot. A comparison of the subject matter I had intended to pursue in the initial semi-structured interview with the actual outcome in the interview record showed quite a discrepancy; this interview plan was therefore refocused and tightened. Similarly, for the final tape recorded interview, a comparison of the interview outline and the intended content areas as analysed under the operational constructs showed that the design could be better organised. In both cases the question guides were restructured to make for a better correspondence with the relevant operational constructs.

A more fundamental development was the process of revising the original, provisional system of operational constructs. Study of the fieldnotes, interview records and analytical commentary arising from the pilot revealed that a number of important substantive areas of discussion which had arisen spontaneously in contacts with the pilot agency were not adequately envisaged or provided for in the original scheme of operational constructs. Similarly, a number of new distinctions were found to be

necessary to reflect the commonsense conceptualisations in use by practitioners and avoid ambiguities. Fairly important changes were made in consequence, and these will be described in section 6.5 below.

In addition to refining the processes of data collection and analysis, the pilot highlighted an important characteristic of the field which was to influence substantially the design of the rest of the study. It became clear that the context in which the agency operated had a major bearing on the direction of its work and the manner of its being carried out. This small agency was financially dependent on others and, although notionally an independent voluntary organisation, was strongly directed by various individuals connected with the two local authorities. The local authorities, and other agencies of a non-statutory kind, were powerfully influential on the whole field of unemployment initiatives in the area in question. To understand what took place therefore it was necessary to relate the agency to the relatively dense network of other actors having direct influence over it, or sharing comparable objectives and fields of work. Some of the influential organisations were among those included in the original survey.

In view of this system of influences and the importance of the contextual data I decided to select future sites in the same geographical area, in the expectation that information gained at one site would have relevance for understanding what took place in another. Equally, the information that might be gained by interviewing a number of these powerful individuals who were not themselves members of the identified study population, would be of general relevance. The implementation of this decision is described in section 6.6 below.

6.5 The operational constructs at conclusion of pilot stage

The purpose of this section is to explain the meaning of the operational constructs as modified and elaborated by the pilot study. This will be done by taking each in turn and amplifying a brief definition by means of examples taken from the field studies. I shall, therefore, be including a limited amount of material generated at a later stage than the pilot study in order to illustrate the constructs as they stood at the conclusion of the pilot. The reasons for this are to vary the range of illustrative examples, and to avoid jeopardy to the identity of the pilot site.

The operational constructs and the action model embody a reasonably straightforward distinction between attributes of the practitioner as an individual and features of the situation she works in. The assumption is that the practitioner possesses various attributes which combine to produce a distinctive profile. The individual profile evolves over time but is assumed to be relatively stable during the carrying out of any given piece of work. Inasmuch therefore as each profile is unique, so no two individuals would be expected to act in quite the same way in a given situation. On the other hand, insofar as the individual practitioner applies largely similar knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and skills to each situation she works in, so there will tend to develop a style, pattern approach or habit of mind characteristic of that practitioner.

The practitioner works within a situation or social context which, again, is assumed to be only relatively slowly changing. This constitutes the environment of practice which any individual would have to contend with and which is likely to circumscribe very strongly what is seen as practicable or desirable work.

It is of course true that over time the practitioner and the situation will influence each other. The experience the practitioner gains in carrying out her job will add to her store of useful and relevant knowledge as well as modifying her attitudes. The situation the practitioner works in will change over time as a result of her efforts; indeed, it may well be precisely the aim of the organisation to change the situation. Nevertheless, it is assumed for the purpose of this research that there is a tenable distinction between practitioner-related and situational factors.

In the list that follows the operational constructs are arranged alphabetically for ease of reference, with an accompanying note to distinguish practitioner-related and situational factors. A summary chart of the operational constructs at the conclusion of the pilot

TABLE 6.4

Operational constructs at conclusion of pilot

These categories represent the operational constructs of Fig. 6.2 as modified by the experience of the pilot. They are intended together to act as (mostly indirect) descriptors of, or corroborators of, a practitioner's model for practice. They provided the framework for gathering and analysing data in subsequent studies of workers and agencies.

- ARP** Activities, routines, practices; particularly direct service activities. Those currently practised, or in the past.
- C** Contextual information about the environment the agency works in - factual/objective, or purportedly so
- N** Needs of users/user groups/intended users
- OR** Origins and rationale of organisation; conceptions of role of organisation and worker
- P** Personal background information
- PAM** Personal attitudes, values, and moral views; precepts for own actions
- POL** Political views - more generalised and abstract precepts
- PP** Practice precepts - prescriptive statements of a fairly general nature, typically without an elaborated or explicit explanation or justification
- PR** Plans, programmes; pattern of intended future actions seen as desirable (cf. ARP)
- R** Resources of agency, or available to it, including personnel
- S** Satisfaction/dissatisfaction of users
- SI** Analysis of social issues, typically constructed in a form to draw attention to a social problem
- SPI** Structures of power and influence
- TH** Theoretical ideas of an abstract nature. Significant exemplars, parallels, analogies
- TR** Training history and experience

stage is given in Table 6.4. In a number of cases different operational constructs may seem very close to, or not entirely distinguishable from, their near neighbours. This follows from the decision at this point in the research to incur the risk of too many distinctions in preference to the risk of too few. It is generally acknowledged to be easier to collapse redundant or spurious classifications into fewer categories, than to implement retrospectively a distinction that was not envisaged at the outset. This is another conservative assumption of the kind described earlier, that where there is uncertainty about a distinction it is better to cope with its possible confirmation by assuming the possibility in the first place.

ARP: Activities, Routines, Practices (situational)

This denotes the everyday activities of workers in the organisations, with particular reference to service delivery activities rather than organisational maintenance activities. As might be expected, the character of these activities was closely related to the organisation type.

The volunteer bureaux' prime function was twofold: on the one hand, to attract potential volunteers, interview them, train them if necessary, and place them in appropriate projects; and on the other, to seek and identify suitable projects where volunteers might be placed. Together these activities are known as a 'clearing house' function. Special categories of voluntary work are identified, as are special categories of volunteers; for these, distinctive arrangements may be made. A range of activities serves the central clearing house function, such as publicity work, speaking to groups, running training courses, or liaising with many other organisations.

C: Context (situational)

Context denotes important aspects of the environment the agency works in. Under this heading were identified objective factors beyond the workers' or the agencies' control which might be expected to have a strong influence on the work chosen, the manner of pursuing it, or both. These might include, for example, the policies and politics of the local authority.

OR: Origins and rationale (situational)

It is very characteristic of voluntary social service organisations to explain their existence by means of a condensed historical narrative of their foundation. Quite often this will be cast in terms of the vision and initiative of a particular charismatic figure,

and where the organisation is long-established the narrative not uncommonly begins to acquire the aspect of myth or legend.

The foundation story provides a convenient encapsulation of the organisation's understanding of its professed purposes, and was therefore noted in the field studies. In several cases, the founders were still key members and were able to give a personal account of their experience and motivation in setting up the organisation. The story of the origins and rationale of the organisation should not, of course, be mistaken for an account of its current activities and preoccupations; indeed it is quite common for voluntary organisations to maintain the foundation story as a device for self-legitimation when in fact the real goals and activities may have departed a long way from it.

P: Personal background information (practitioner)

This heading was used to collate personal information about the identified practitioners, which seemed likely to have a bearing on their conduct of their practice. Although it is not easy to define this area precisely, it was abundantly clear from the practitioners' own accounts that they regarded some aspects of their past or current personal experience as very important for the ways in which they did their job. For example, a worker in an unemployed workers' centre had had several years' employment with the DHSS, and was therefore familiar with both the detailed functioning of the social security system and with the attitudes prevalent in the bureaucracy. This was invaluable in his dealings with the DHSS on behalf of centre users. The use of informal structures and quasi-natural conversations during the fieldwork facilitated the discovery of significant background or personal factors; the practitioners' consciousness of these meant that they would adduce them in talking about their work.

PAM: Personal attitudes, values and moral views (practitioner)

This heading refers to the practitioners' moral attitudes and beliefs, especially over matters relevant to their work situation. The construct covers the ethical precepts the practitioners would adopt for their own actions; their values and standards when faced with a potentially ambiguous situation. It also refers to features of the practitioners' character and personality which, by their own report or from my observation, seemed likely to have an important influence on their conduct of their work. In other words, it extends to traits or dispositions to feel, believe or act in certain characteristic ways.

It should be noted that no attempt was made to be exhaustive on this topic, since there

are obviously large areas of normative standards and ethical debate which are not relevant to the purposes of this research. Workers in social service organisations generally share tacitly in an implicit practical morality which is seldom discussed unless it is specifically challenged by a problematic situation or deviant actions. Under this heading therefore the intention was to note distinctive features of the practitioners' attitudes and moral views which, in this context, one should not take for granted. Equally, it would be beyond the scope of the research to compile a comprehensive personality analysis, even supposing such a thing were possible. Rather, it is a matter of observing and noting those features which both predominantly and distinctively affected the individual's conduct of her practice.

A worker in an unemployed workers' centre explained that her own experience of unemployment had been crucial to the formation of her attitudes about it; in particular her experience had enabled her to see that it could present an opportunity to break away from a narrow and stultifying work experience. She made this general point about the potentially liberating effect of unemployment by instancing her own experience:

Unemployment's given me the opportunity to do what I want to do, do what I can do. To change the whole course of your life. And I don't mind using my personal experience in that way.

A worker of wide experience now employed in a volunteer bureau depicted herself as by nature questioning and critical:

I think perhaps I am a natural rebel... I like asking questions.... If somebody says it has got to be done this way, I am the one that will say 'but why'. I think maybe it's my own nature.

A worker in a council of social service having an academic arts background deplored the conceptual vagueness and lack of rigorous debate which she saw as typical in the voluntary sector.

POL: Political views (practitioner)

Under this heading were recorded the political sentiments expressed by practitioners in considering the wider issues they worked with. The point here was to abstract their general stance or political orientation rather than their views about particular situations (cf. SI below). For example, one might find that a practitioner generally favoured the provision of welfare services by the state or its agencies. In fact, a number of the

practitioners were formal and active members of the Labour Party, while many belonged to a trade union. They adopted views from the range one might expect from association with these bodies. The volume of material under this heading also gives a rough indication of how politically motivated a practitioner is.

PP: Practice precepts (practitioner)

It is centrally, and obviously, relevant to this research to examine the prescriptive statements that practitioners will readily make when offered the opportunity to explain how something should be done. Such statements typically have an epigrammatic quality; they are traded in shorthand, usually without the benefit of any substantial explanation or justification.

Practice precepts differ in kind from theory in the sense delimited in Chapter 2, because they do not necessarily invoke evidence or furnish an explanation. However, they may well entail theory implicitly; and practitioners may refer to their content as theory in one of the loose usages mentioned earlier. Equally however, practice precepts may equate with the fruit of individual experience, or practice wisdom.

A worker in a council of social service described his role as an initiator of new projects in the following terms:

You have to follow your hunches.... It's all about making contacts and having local information and knowing where to go and that's something a committee can't know but it is also about trying to bring your committee along and helping them to think within a policy framework of what we are trying to do.

A worker in an unemployed workers' centre said that the centre encouraged its staff to 'do their own thing'. A colleague put it thus:

We are no' only just interested in developing the centre, we are also interested in developing individuals [the centre's staff].

A volunteer bureau worker held that the best way to elicit a volunteer's interests in the initial interview was to 'let them talk, listen to what's coming out'. One must take the time to encourage the person, 'to try and bring out the spark of what they can do'.

PR: Plans and programmes (situational)

This refers to activities it was proposed, or hoped, to undertake in the foreseeable future; thus it is a counterpart of ARP above.

An unemployed workers' centre expected within a few months to move to much larger premises which would greatly expand the range as well as the volume of work possible. Considerable effort was being spent in planning for the move.

A council of social service had drawn up a plan of firmly and provisionally adopted work for the next year or two, with consequent changes in staff responsibilities.

R: Resources (situational)

Resources denotes the finance, personnel, premises and equipment the agency had available to carry out its work.

SE: Analysis of social issues (practitioner)

Under this heading were collated practitioners' views on social policies and social problems relevant to their work. Unemployment and its consequences could be expected to figure largely here.

A worker in a volunteer bureau was deeply critical of the influence of the MSC's Volunteer Projects Programme on practice in volunteering; she considered that the MSC were trying to usurp volunteering for purposes quite antithetical to its true ends as she understood them.

A worker in an unemployed workers' centre held strong views about the destructive effects of unemployment on individuals. She saw it as a social cancer which destroys people. Their confidence is low and their self esteem shattered. They suffer poverty which exacerbates the psychological effects. They lack opportunity.

A worker in an unemployed workers' centre saw that public reaction to unemployment was not universally negative:

There are still people out there who think unemployment is not too bad a thing. It has curbed the power of the trade unions and it has got rid of wastage out of our industry etc. They don't think about the personal side.

SPI: Structures of power and influence (situational)

This category refers to the many forms of social influence which act upon staff and organisations to affect the nature of what they do, sometimes against their wishes or their judgement. Perhaps the most obvious of these are internal control structures such

as executive committees and the formal powers vested in them by a constitution. All the organisations studied possessed a committee system, but there was very great variation in the efficacy of the committees. It is also a commonplace that whereas in principle the committee mandates the staff, in practice it is often the staff who use the committee largely to legitimate whatever they wished to carry on anyway.

External organisations were powerfully influential in all cases studied. This might well be expected given that these were small organisations of limited expertise trying to tackle large problems by means of meagre resources over which they held only tenuous strategic control. An obvious power structure subsists in the funding relationship. Another highly significant influence in some cases was various arms of the local authorities.

The structures of power and influence are not limited to formal organisational relationships. In the networks in which the practitioners operated, former or concurrent personal and professional contacts, and the opinions that went with them, influenced practitioners' conceptions of what opportunities or impediments might exist.

The standing of an unemployed workers' centre was very strongly influenced by the rising political fortunes of two of its key staff in roles outwith their formal position in the centre.

An unemployed workers' centre experienced a period of internal stress and conflict in which managers, staff and users jostled for control over key aspects of the centre's running. This was eventually institutionalised by setting up a complicated committee system. The system gave recognition of the rights and duties of the various interested parties. Nevertheless in reality most of the power remained concentrated in very few hands.

A worker held an important voluntary office with the Manpower Services Commission. He was thus in a relatively advantageous position to anticipate, and to some extent influence, the conduct of the MSC's programmes, of which his own organisation was a major agent.

Two workers in different organisations within the same locality had a personal relationship of friendship and mutual support, where they could share in confidence some of the frustrations and satisfactions of their respective jobs and the environment

they both worked within.

TH: Theory (practitioner)

The heading of theory was used to record more abstract theoretical ideas which the practitioners expressed or showed some knowledge of during my conversations with them. These ideas would generally but not exclusively be drawn from community work, social work, social policy, psychology and other relevant fields.

The category was not however restricted to theory in the most rigorous senses; also admitted was background knowledge from diverse sources including anecdotal material which, for the practitioner concerned, served as a significant exemplar or analogy. The experience of the pilot demonstrated and recalled that practitioners may well elevate a particular event or observation to the effective status of theory, especially perhaps if that is all there is to go on: one example of how something happened, however theoretically inadequate to furnish prescription or explanation, is still much better than total ignorance. In effect, a story becomes a pseudosystem: an example becomes an abstraction.

A worker in an unemployed workers' centre recalled how a lecture on attachment in infancy had brought back her own experience of motherhood.

A worker in an unemployed workers' centre had been much impressed by a visit made as a student to a community arts project, and hoped to emulate some of its ideas in the future development of the centre.

A worker in a volunteer bureau conveyed a vivid understanding of social life in a traditional rural community, based on his own childhood experience.

A worker in a volunteer bureau explained that it was important for the bureau not to handle too great a proportion of dependent or 'difficult to place' volunteers, as this would tend to result in the loss of the indispensable support and goodwill of other voluntary organisations.

TR: Training history and experience (practitioner)

This final heading was used to collate information about practitioners' training and formal qualifications, and therefore to shed light upon the skills and knowledge they would be expected to possess. In discussing this area, practitioners would also be

reminded about important educational experiences which could inform their current practice.

6.6 Main field studies

By the stage of completion of the pilot study I had, therefore, decided to concentrate the field studies on four organisation types - unemployed workers' centres, community businesses, volunteer bureaux, councils for voluntary service; and for the reasons given in section 6.4, to select agencies working in the same networks and geographical areas. The three main methods of data collection would be semi-structured interviews of identified practitioners, observation, and study of agency documents. These would be supplemented as necessary by interviews of key influential individuals who were not members of the organisations. Experience suggested that five or six working days would be needed to satisfy the criterion of getting to know the agencies well enough for their practices, and for the behaviour of key personnel, to become easily intelligible and relatively predictable. The system of analysis embodied in the operational constructs had been refined to the point where, on the basis of one site experience, it worked tolerably well.

The next issue to be faced was the size and selection of the main sample. It was clear from the survey, and from anecdotal sources, that a substantial variation existed in the kinds of work carried out, the organisational auspices, level of resources, practitioner expertise, fundamental aims, etc. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the universe of study comprised several hundred cases (if we limit consideration to Scotland) varying to an unknown extent on an unknown but large number of variables. In such circumstances it is impossible to define precise sampling frames. On the other hand, it was not the primary aim to produce a comprehensive survey, but rather to test a theoretical model which by design and presumption was of rather general application. A very small sample of, say two or three cases would incur the obvious risk of unrepresentativeness, but a large scale study was arguably inappropriate to the present state of knowledge as well as beyond the available resources.

Taking all these factors into account, as well as the limitations necessarily imposed by the time and resources available for this study, it was decided to aim for a study population of eight organisations. These would be concentrated in two geographical areas, with each area containing one of each of the four organisation types. The area

TABLE 6.5

Field studies: sampling considerations

<u>Criterion</u>	<u>Reasons</u>
1. Geographical convenience	To save time and money
2. In Zone A, for say half the sample	<p>The network of organisations in Zone A concerned with unemployment is interesting in its own right, because of their large number and because of the social and economic climate in Zone A.</p> <p>By working the Zone A network, opportunities for cross-referencing and collaboration are increased as the same actors are involved in different agencies. Also strengthens knowledge of <u>context</u>, <u>needs</u>, <u>resources</u>, <u>structures of power and influence</u>.</p>
3. For organisations not necessarily and specifically concerned with unemployment (CVS and VB), evidence of interest in this area is important.	If activities are seen as unrelated to unemployment, the data will be difficult to compare meaningfully with data arising situations where unemployment is focus of concern. It is important to have a sample of organisations or practitioners engaged in comparable activities to maintain reasonably close focus.
4. Likely richness of data, as deducible from range of activities (from my survey and literature), priority given to unemployment, number of staff employed on unemployment issues, interest shown informally in survey results.	Agencies where practice is rather underdeveloped are less likely to prove a taxing test of the theoretical framework I am trying to develop. Also experience suggests it is competent practitioners who undertake the greatest number and diversity of activities; the models for practice of competent practitioners are more interesting than those of incompetent or inactive practitioners.
5. Qualification of key practitioners - CQSW/C.Ed./ other. Unfortunately this information is not available!	Possible differences of approach according to professional background.

selected for the pilot was by now known to offer at least one of each of the four types, and much had already been learned about common and mutual influences. I decided to proceed with a complete set of four in the first area. The four will be referred to as Group A, and the geographical area as Zone A.

The second group, Group B, was chosen by first identifying a number of geographical areas which, on the basis of the survey results, contained sufficient active agencies of the desired types. Four such possibilities emerged. One was eliminated because its large and dense population, with high unemployment rates, supported so much activity that tracing the networks of influence would be a large task out of proportion to the small number of agencies to be studied. Of the remaining three, Zone B emerged as a clear preference on the detailed application of the sampling criteria which are set out in Table 6.5. It transpired that, contrary to the documentary sources, Zone B did not include a viable community business. It did however contain a strongly active organisation with community development origins, linked to the network of unemployment initiatives in the locality, and devoted to working with unemployed people in what was defined in Chapter 5 as the prevention model. This site was substituted for the unavailable community business.

It may be helpful to bear in mind the following brief outlines of the two study areas. Zone A is a semi-rural district profoundly affected by catastrophic decline in its traditional heavy industries, which were distributed in pockets amid farm country and scattered small towns. Deeply traditional attitudes prevail in all areas of social life: to work, the family, the role of women, labour organisation, etc. Zone A is economically a poor area, with a high proportion of working class residents. Fieldwork in Zone A was carried out from May 1986 to February 1987, including the pilot.

Zone B could be described as a small city, also much affected by changing industrial patterns and the collapse of traditional industry, but supporting a greater diversity of economic and social life than Zone A. Fieldwork in Zone B was carried out from February to July 1987.

The conduct of the field studies proceeded much as the pilot had done. An initial interview was used to establish contact, collect basic information and negotiate further access. The outline for this interview is shown as Annex 6.6. All the agencies approached agreed to cooperate, and in nearly all cases the subjects were extremely welcoming, open and helpful. I was able to witness nearly all the activities I wished.

Outline for initial semi-structured interview with service-providing organisations: final version

Introductory statement

- myself and department
- topic of research: voluntary organisation responses to unemployment, and thinking of practitioners engaged in this work
- aims today: - to gather basic information about your work and your organisation
 - to discuss whether you would be willing for me to have further contact with yourself and others involved.

Q.1 (OR)

When was organisation started; who were initiators; what were their aims and intentions; what stimulated the initiative; what sponsorship or support was there.

Q.2 (ARP)

Explain current activities:

- of the organisation as a whole
- of interviewee.

Distinguish unemployment-related and other.

Q.3 (PR)

Any important plans or programmes not covered above; distinguish unemployment related and others.

Q.4 (R)

Explain resources of organisation, esp. personnel - details of all involved - and funding.

Conclusion

- request for any documents or publications relevant to this discussion
- discuss willingness to give assistance in amplifying the picture: [specify as relevant from] meet others involved, within and outside the organisation; attend meetings; observe worker(s); read records; meet users/clients; etc.
- undertaking on confidentiality.

ANNEX 6.7

Content of initial and final semi-structured interviews

Initial interview

OR

ARP

PR

R

For key to mnemonics see Tab. 6.4

Final interview

P,TR

PP

SI,TH

SPI

POL,PAM

Broadly speaking the first interview concerns what is done, and the second why it is done.

(In the case of one agency there was evidence of some reservations arising from the complicated political position of the chief actors. However, there were good opportunities for corroboration, so data quality was not severely affected.) There then followed several days (usually three or four) spent in observation, accompanying people as they went about their work, and talking informally with users, visitors, committee members, etc.

The final stage of work with each identified practitioner was the tape-recorded interview whose detailed content depended on the outcome of earlier observations and interviews. This aspect of the design is considered rather important, as it makes for a fieldwork process which is interactive and reflexive rather than consisting in the mechanical application of inert instruments. Annex 6.7 defines the objectives of the final interview in the general terms of the operational constructs; the detailed questions obviously varied from case to case.

The initial interview was recorded by means of a write-up compiled soon afterwards on the basis of jotted notes made at the time. As I had extensive prior interview experience this process was not unduly problematic. Time spent in observation and informal discussion was recorded by similar techniques, the main difference being that on-the-spot note taking was sometimes inappropriate and had to be replaced by notes made at the earliest opportunity; usually this would be a little later during the course of the working day. The main bulk of the raw data therefore consisted of interview and field notes, plus agency documents and my own notes made from them.

The outcome of the field studies will be described in the following chapters, drawing attention to the dynamic relationship between fieldwork and the action model. Two other topics merit attention at this stage. As the studies progressed it emerged that the framework set out in this chapter did not distinguish clearly enough between the activities, theories, ideologies, and so on pertaining to individual practitioners and those pertaining to organisations. Certainly, in the world of small experimental voluntary organisations the distinction is often difficult to make in practice. But since the focus of this study is on the mind of the practitioner rather than the dynamics of organisations, the issue is of obvious importance. It was thrown into relief when studying those organisations which employed more than one professional level practitioner. In the eventual process of coding and analysis therefore, much more attention was paid than implied hitherto in distinguishing whether matters related to key practitioners individually, or to other people in the organisation, or (in some sense)

TABLE 6.8

Distribution by site and qualifications of identified practitioners

Zone	Site	Org. type	Ident. pract.	Qualification		
				CQSW/ Dip.CE	Other prof.	No further or higher
A	A1	UWC	P1	/		
	A2	CVS	P2	/		
	A3	CB	P3		/	
			P4		/	
	A4	VB	P5			/
B	B1	CVS	P6	/		
			P7		/	
	B2	VB	P8	/		
			P9		/	
			P10	/		
	B3	UWC	P10		/	
			P11		/	
	B4	*	P13	/		
			P14	/		
TOTALS	8		14	7	6	1

*Site B4, an organisation sui generis, did not exactly correspond with any of the organisation types identified earlier.

Qualifications:

CQSW/Dip.CE: Certificate of Qualification in Social Work or its earlier equivalents, or Diploma in Community Education or equivalent.

Other prof.: other professional or higher education qualifications.

No further or higher: no further or higher education.

TABLE 6.9

Revised operational constructs

These categories provided the framework for the analysis of field and interview notes, as well as being used to structure interviews and observation.

ARPA	Activities, routines, practices (current and past) found in the agency, particularly direct service activities, but excluding those of the identified (subject) practitioners.
ARPP	Ditto, those of the identified practitioners.
AS	Action skills of practitioner.
C	Contextual information about the environment the agency works in - factual/objective, or purportedly so.
OR	Origins and current rationale of organisation; conceptions of role of organisation and worker.
P	Personal background information.
PAM	Personal attitudes, values, and moral views; precepts for own actions.
POL	Political views - more generalised and abstract precepts.
PP	Practice precepts - identified practitioners' prescriptive statements of a fairly general nature, typically without an elaborated or explicit explanation or justification.
PPA	Ditto - in agency, other than identified practitioners'.
PR	Plans, programmes; pattern of intended future actions seen as desirable (cf. ARPA, ARPP).
R	Resources of agency, or available to it, including personnel
SI	Analysis of social issues, typically constructed in a form to draw attention to a social problem.
SPIO	Structures of power and influence outside staff group.
SPIS	Structures of power and influence within staff group.
TH	Theoretical ideas of an abstract nature. Significant exemplars, parallels, analogies.
TR	Training history and experience.

the scale and design of this study. For example, the category of personal attitudes and moral values is potentially very large. The process of data analysis, like that of collection, had therefore to be constantly informed by the awareness of the most important factors. Indeed, data collection had been pursued much more vigorously in some areas than in others, according to the likely importance of the material to the problem in hand.

The first generation of revisions thus required to the operational constructs were generally straightforward, in most cases consisting of a splitting of one category into two. One new construct was added. These revisions are described next and are summarised in Table 6.9.

The construct ARP - activities, routines, practices - was split into two. ARPA covers the activities prevalent in the agency which were not those of the identified practitioners. ARPP covers the specific activities of the identified practitioners.

The construct PP was split in a similar fashion. PP was retained to cover the practice precepts of the identified practitioners. PPA was added to cover notions of proper practice which were found to be circulating in an agency but could not safely be ascribed to any one person. Often these notions are built up through formal and informal discussion in a staff group working together over a period of time. They become, in a sense, the property of the team rather than of any one individual.

The construct SPI was split into SPIO, covering structures of power and influence located outside the staff group, and SPIS, covering structures of power and influence within the staff group.

The new construct added was AS, for action skills. This was used to record practical action skills the practitioners possessed, either by their own claim or by my observation. Occasionally the evidence of third parties could be added too. Action skills includes such things as being a good organiser; being effective in interpersonal communication; having the ability to engage the interest, enthusiasm and support of others in proposed activities; being able to conduct groups effectively. Evidently, in a field such as the one selected for this study it is communication and interpersonal skills which predominate in importance, although more purely practical skills have a place too.

The abstraction of material under construct AS, action skills, varied somewhat from the

others. For most of the constructs practitioners' and other informants' statements can be taken either as a reasonably reliable source, or in some cases the only practical source, of the data in question. In the case of action skills however it is plainly a risky course to rely solely on practitioners' own subjective judgements of their skill, or even on the opinions of other people who know them in their work. In this area my personal observations (including observations of non-verbal behaviour) provided the key source. Most of the relevant action skills in this context - such as interview, communication and organisation skills - were ones where I felt competent to make a judgement on the basis of my own expertise.

The second stage of analysis, after the initial labelling using this slightly expanded set of operational constructs, was to abstract the coded material from the records and collate it under the operational constructs. This was not treated as a straightforward 'cut and paste' operation for two reasons. Firstly, simply transposing sections of text from one page to another is all too likely to distort its significance, as the context may be lost. This is particularly a problem when the record is dense in the sense of containing large amounts of significant content in relatively few lines on the page. Secondly, a simple transcription operation would do nothing to boil down the notes which, though written concisely where possible, were inevitably still fairly voluminous. The process of abstraction was therefore akin to making a *précis*, in which the aim is to capture faithfully the essentials of meaning in clear and compact form, with due regard to the significance of context and sensitivity to the idiosyncrasies of individuals' use of language.

It should be noted that the records from one site quite commonly contained materials relevant to another. This of course resulted from the decision to select sites in two restricted areas where there were active interconnections between agencies. These glimpses from outside afforded an interesting comparison to the materials gathered from inside the agencies, and some degree of corroboration.

The third stage of analysis could perhaps better be described as synthesis. Here, the materials collated in the second stage abstracts were rewritten according to the structure of the emerging, and re-emerging, action model. In order to carry out this process a number of derived constructs was introduced, which stood in direct relationship to the action model in its then current form. The substance of these derived constructs and their relationship to the operational constructs will be presented and discussed in Chapter 9, in the light of the content of the materials to be presented especially in Chapter 8. The transformation of the original operational constructs into the derived

set evolved progressively as the analysis proceeded and was impelled by the need to resolve a number of theoretical and practical ambiguities that became apparent in the content of the original constructs and in their interrelationship. In other words, the need to make sense of the data within the theoretical framework of this research led to progressive reformulation of the data categories and their relationship to the issue of how to account for practitioners' use of theory. In each step of the reformulation process however, care was taken to ensure that the new categories did not do violence to the natural structure of the raw materials. On the contrary, the aim was always to find a formulation which more naturally described the reality.

About half way through the analysis process the coding procedure was changed to follow the now much modified exploratory theoretical framework. Instead of coding the material to the original operational constructs, it was now coded to the new derived constructs. In consequence of this, the number of analysis stages was reduced from three to two. The problem had shifted from the identification of the relevant factors in practitioners' use of theory, to trying to explain how these factors acted together to give every practitioner's work its distinctive, unique stamp.

The next two chapters will present the findings of the field studies under the situational and practitioner related operational constructs, respectively. In the light of the factors, relationships and issues that the analysis revealed, the redeveloped constructs and action model are presented and debated further in Chapter 9.

CHAPTER 7

Patterns and influences in the work of organisations

7.1 Activities in context

The service activities undertaken by the eight organisations covered in the field studies were consistent with the findings of the survey detailed in Chapter 5. No work specifically in relation to unemployed people or unemployment was discovered which could not readily be categorised under the activity variables of the survey. What does emerge from the field studies is an impression, which no brief overview based on aggregate and pre-categorised data could offer, of the patterns, rhythms and priorities characteristic of the organisations studied and the practitioners who worked in them. The various activities carried out within each of the organisations naturally possessed interrelationships which are not revealed by the survey. It needs also to be borne in mind that for two categories of organisations covered in this study, namely the councils for voluntary service and the volunteer bureaux, work on unemployment related issues is not necessarily seen as part of the organisation's remit - although all the organisations covered in the field studies were in fact heavily involved with unemployed people. The main focus and direction of daily work were not therefore necessarily seen as related to unemployment. This general sense of purpose, and its relationship to daily activities, were not evident from the survey but were centrally relevant to the field studies.

The utility of the survey therefore is to derive a partial and abstracted summary of a wide range of activities undertaken by a large number of somewhat heterogeneous organisations, which led to some broad generalisations about models of intervention. In this chapter I shall begin by demonstrating, by reference to material drawn from the field studies, the influence of the external environment and the specific local context on practitioners' actions. I shall aim to describe, within the limitations of anonymity, something of the influences which shape the character and internal logic of the activities of the practitioners and work of the organisations. The theme will be the organisations' attempts to adapt and survive in an environment where opportunities and constraints were mostly beyond their control. Secondly I shall summarise and classify

the activities carried on in the organisations.

In this chapter I intend therefore to illustrate the content defined by those parts of the action model which refer to the situation or context in which the practitioner works, and which are described by the situational operational constructs elaborated in the previous chapter. Discussion of what is perhaps the greatest influence of all in the work of the organisations - the beliefs and dispositions of the practitioners involved - is reserved for the next chapter.

7.2 Operating at the margin: the circumstances of the organisations

The organisations in the study were subject to various influences, from within their own structures and from aspects of the external environment, which very substantially affected and constrained what they were able to do. I shall firstly refer in passing to the social and cultural context in which the organisations operated. I shall consider next the impact of the policies of government and its agencies. Thirdly I shall examine the influence of the organisations' own members and structures beyond the staff group, and of other powerful individuals and organisations at the local level.

Unemployment is due, no doubt, to social change and economic policy at national and international levels; but the nature of its specific manifestations at the local level depends to a large extent on specific local conditions. A clear relationship could readily be traced between the industrial history of the local areas in this study and some of the problems which the organisations were trying to tackle. The welfare issues took on a certain character as a result of prevailing social norms and practices, and equally work in the prevention model had to be tuned to local opportunities, and needs and aspirations in the unemployed labour force. Now it is not possible here to go much beyond the brief sketch of the local areas in Chapter 6 without disclosing their location. Nor is this study focused on the sociology and anthropology of local communities. The independent evidence available did indeed support the conclusion that the history and character of local communities is a real factor in shaping local needs and opportunities. However, in the next chapter I shall describe practitioners' perceptions of the importance of these matters. This will illustrate some of the relevant aspects, and show that the character of the local community is also important because practitioners believe it to be so.

The organisations in this study, though of course all within the voluntary sector, were in many ways the creatures of central and local government policy. Without exception they obtained the vast bulk of their funding from government sources. These sources were principally of three kinds: direct subvention from central government; grant from the local authorities; and funding under one or other of the programmes of the (now defunct) Manpower Services Commission, which is a government agency. Various combinations and hybrids of these sources exist, as do other minor government funded sources.

The degree of influence and control exerted by the funding bodies over the policies and activities of the agencies varied quite markedly according to the source of funding and the arm of central or local government policy which it represented. From the organisations' point of view, the most permissive kind of funding was direct central government grant. Once agreement on funding within the relevant general guidelines had been obtained, the organisation would usually be treated by the funding authority with benign neglect, subject to merely formal controls. Next best was local authority funding, which again carried relatively little interference at a day to day level once the funding had been obtained. Special mention should be made of Urban Programme funding, a form granted by central government but partly controlled by, and requiring a 25% commitment from, local government. This again permitted considerable freedom.

By far the most constraining forms of funding were those under MSC special employment and training schemes. The organisations were obliged by them to deliver programmes stipulated in great detail by the MSC for national use, and permitting hardly any flexibility in the interpretation of rules and procedures. These governed such matters as wage rates, length and terms of employment, supervisor ratios, full to part time staff ratios, and allowable overheads. One of the most significant constraints of all was that sponsors were not permitted to recruit according to merit, but usually had to draw on unemployed people among whom the requisite skills for a particular job could not always be found. The organisations' control over their schemes was further reduced by the administrative practices of the MSC, of which one of the most effective, or irksome, was to deny organisations knowledge of whether a scheme would be funded or continued until the very last moment - perhaps a matter of hours before staff had to be dismissed. It is not easy to judge whether this was due to deliberate manipulation on the part of the MSC or just overwork, incompetence and preoccupation with the internal demands of bureaucracy at the expense of the intended beneficiaries; but it was

hard to escape the sense of being a victim of conspiracy that this performance inevitably tended to generate, and the inevitable insecurity of schemes, employees and sponsors.

The MSC's influence was not, however, confined to the mere mechanics of schemes, tiresome as these were for all concerned. The very character and basic aims of the schemes mounted by the organisations were shaped by the funding programmes. The organisations had put up projects for funding in response to the (usually nationwide) initiatives of the MSC; they looked for ways to adapt existing activities, or develop new ones, in forms which would qualify for the relative cornucopia of MSC funding. However, the policy objectives represented by successive waves of MSC programmes were not necessarily complementary to the aims of the organisations. Briefly stated, the objectives of MSC programmes were to reduce the apparent numbers of unemployed people, and latterly, to begin low-level training for the unskilled. The organisations on the other hand wished to implement various social action schemes; they had no interest in placing unemployed people in jobs they might be ill suited to, and (with one exception) they had little interest or expertise in training. In these circumstances it often arose that the MSC expected a project to be pursued in a way which was at variance with what the sponsoring organisation wished to do, or felt it was capable of doing. The problem was made worse by the fact that the emphasis of MSC policy changed frequently, so that the organisations found themselves under pressure to change a scheme even during the short period of its contract; the organisations justifiably complained of moving goalposts. For example, during the period of the study the MSC proscribed new Community Programme projects in unemployed workers' centres, while permitting existing ones to continue; but this placed such work under obscure and arbitrarily defined restraints. Another example was the changing direction of the Volunteer Projects Programme, which shifted from providing opportunities for unemployed people to do voluntary work, to increasing their job skills.

The MSC in effect successfully colonised the voluntary sector. It adapted, or usurped, voluntary action to help it implement job creation and training programmes required by national policy. The voluntary organisations looked for interstices in the teeth of national policy which would allow them to carry out some valued project. Whether the voluntary organisations did, or can do, well or badly out of this Faustian bargain is passionately debated. It is certain that many of the activities which feature in this study would never have occurred without the resources and stimulus of MSC programmes. Indeed, half the organisations in this study would probably never have

come into existence, or would not have survived, without MSC funding. But the relationship was seldom harmonious, and bore all the stigmata of unequal compromise between fundamentally different aspirations.

Aside from funding, other aspects of local authority policy in particular were significant for the organisations. For the more traditional types of organisation, the councils for voluntary service and the volunteer bureaux, there is an evident similarity of interest with some local authority services particularly in the social work area. These organisations operated therefore in a service environment largely determined by the local authority. They had to choose and suit their activities to the social service framework which existed in their area, and adapt as necessary to its idiosyncrasies. For example, opportunities for voluntary work with certain client groups depended on the cooperation of social work departments; and social work departments were significant referrers of potential volunteers. Or again, the possible need for new projects and services obviously would depend on what was already in place.

In the social service arena cooperative arrangements existed which worked tolerably well at the day to day level between individual practitioners on either side. Beyond this however, working relationships were often rather distant, even where the local authority might have been expected to take a closer interest because it funded the organisation. Effective cross-representation on committees hardly existed. There was very little evidence to counter the interpretation that the local authorities, in terms of policy, treated these voluntary organisations with indifference. Even in terms of cooperation at ground level, the picture was mixed; although workers in the voluntary organisations tended to identify one or two key people as helpful or influential, they seemed not to be in good contact with the many other local authority workers who might have been equally relevant. In a number of cases voluntary organisation workers, on the basis of personal but not always strictly relevant experience, were sharply critical of aspects of established social work.

For the unemployed workers' centres and the community business organisations relationships with the local authority tended to be more prominent, and more problematic. In two cases local authority workers had been the main instigators of the projects, and retained positions of very large influence over the organisations; in one case the opposition exerted from a local authority had nearly been fatal. It was noticeable that the de facto influence of key officers and members of the local authority sometimes greatly exceeded that for which a valid mandate could clearly be

shown. Individuals used their positions of power to make policy largely by their own lights, with little real accountability to the proper quarters. Workers in the voluntary organisations struggled to maintain their own influence in the face of the might of the local authority, covertly exerted.

The sphere of local authority policy for which organisations in this second group had relevance is less clearly defined than is social work for the first group. One important area is community education. Workers in the voluntary organisations had no difficulty in recognising a potential affinity between their own goals and the role of the community education service. In practice however there was very little cooperation at the operational level. The voluntary organisation workers generally felt that the local authority community education service was poorly attuned to the needs of unemployed people; some were generally critical of the service on grounds such that it was irrelevant to local needs, unimaginative or inaccessible. Another area of local authority activity which was important for some of the organisations was economic planning. Here, the voluntary organisations wished at least to have a voice in the process of encouraging regeneration; but their resources were too slender to allow them much more than nominal participation, and there is no reason to suppose they made anything but a marginal impact.

Turning now to other influences on the organisations, the next thing to consider is their own management structures. All the organisations had some form of committee or board which nominally decided policy and managed affairs; without exception, these included senior staff and representatives of other organisations. In some cases there existed arrangements of considerable complexity, with different groups of overlapping membership.

The amount of real control which these bodies exerted was quite variable. At one extreme lay the organisation whose committee only functioned very sporadically, and whose incompetence in every area was palpable. At the other extreme lay a committee whose members were nearly all themselves actively involved in the work of the organisation, and were knowledgeable and committed. Somewhere in between lay the committees with the familiar typical strengths and weaknesses of small voluntary organisations. Often the staff had a disproportionate share in decision making; and the committee, while nominally executive in function, in practice ratified or legitimated the decisions and opinions of a small inner circle. This process was amplified by many committee members' lack of grasp of what was happening, since they lacked the

necessary intimate knowledge. While a consultative and legitimating function served some of the organisations well enough, in some cases it led to serious problems. Among those observed were chronic failure to formulate workable policy; being ineffectual and out of touch with important issues; and being over-influenced by one or two key individuals.

Organisations in the study were significantly affected in a number of ways by a relationship with other organisations at the local level. Most of the organisations had obtained their premises on some sort of ad hoc advantageous terms - such as reduced rent or preferential access - with another voluntary organisation or the local authority. In one case resources of staff time, office space, transport and funds were freely shared in a symbiotic relationship between two organisations. In another case a development worker from another non-statutory organisation devoted some effort to trying to remedy what were seen as the shortcomings of the study organisation.

Apart from these more tangible influences, the organisations quite often had historical and current links with other voluntary bodies in the same field. There were two pairs in the study where one organisation had some sort of progenitor relationship to another. Workers were thus aware of the activities, attitudes and personalities of potential colleagues or rivals.

Finally, certain individuals from the local community were recognised as important contributors in one way or another. If they were highly involved in an organisation's activities, on them might rest the worker's hopes of a successful development - or the worker's discouragement over lack of progress. Local people were valued as the authentic local voice, and for the recognition of the workers' efforts which their involvement implied.

What then is the situation of these small voluntary organisations in the wider context of social responses to unemployment? The organisations valued highly their supposed autonomy and independence from governmental bodies; the centrality of this status was little debated, since it was taken for granted. The organisations felt they had an important and distinctive contribution to make, which of its nature could not or should not in general be taken over by statutory organisations. The ability to provide an alternative, independent service; the function of public pressure and criticism; and the role of innovation and development, all free from the taint of officialdom, were seen as vital characteristics of what can be done by the voluntary sector. The evidence of this

study however suggests that these presumptions were rather exaggerated. It is, as we have seen, at least as accurate to characterise such organisations as minor actors in a play they had only marginal power to influence. The scale of their activities was seldom large, even from a purely local perspective, and they were critically dependent for funding on sources directly controlled by central and local government. Their effectiveness in their chosen tasks was, at best, patchy; examples of clearly valuable and imaginative activity supported with minimal resources have to be set against examples of lack of meaningful direction, poorly formulated or incoherent goals, and patent inefficiency. Furthermore, there were many examples of the voluntary organisations having become effectively client states of statutory bodies; they had surrendered their autonomy in certain areas in order to carry out programmes substantially of others' devising, and which they would never have freely chosen for themselves.

It is not possible from the evidence of this study to draw definitive conclusions about the relative value of the organisations and their work in comparison with other sectors, since it was not the aim to conduct that type of evaluation. It can be seen this is an issue of some complexity. There are commonly large discrepancies between notional aims, and the content and scale of actual activities; but it could be argued that in the cause of innovation which is so highly valued in the voluntary sector, there are bound to be gaps between aspirations and what is realistically achievable at any given time, and this is no dishonour. On the issue of control of funding, it could be argued that the indubitable reliance of government sources does not necessarily invalidate the notion of there being definite merit in arm's-length or contract arrangements for some sorts of services. On both these arguments, it could be said that survival and the pursuit of long term aims will on occasion inevitably have to be bought at the price of some compromise. Although the topicality of these questions needs no rehearsal, it remains an open question as to what systems will best procure any given policy aims, especially perhaps in the more marginal reaches of social welfare.

The organisations inhabited a distinctive niche in the world of locality and community based responses to unemployment. This world, born out of local history, was dominated by the giants of local authority service departments and MSC special programmes; and it was ruled more distantly by the parameters of central government policy in economic management, income maintenance, and other policy areas. The voluntary organisations had to bend to prevailing conditions which they had little part in determining; only by following up the opportunities created by other actors could they get the resources for survival. Quite commonly the voluntary organisations found

themselves in this world, or at least in a specific part of it, almost by accident. They had been engulfed by the changes to the local scene brought on by high unemployment, and found themselves inventing new activities and rationales to accommodate the changes. As for the giants, they appeared in all probability to be only rather vaguely aware of the issues and problems with which the small fry of the voluntary organisations were concerned. Certain small numbers of individuals belonging to the statutory authorities found it interesting, useful or expedient to enter into a bargain with voluntary organisations, but it is doubtful that this was reciprocated by much attention to the issues that workers in the voluntary organisations were concerned with.

The status of the organisations thus heavily conditioned the performance and world view of the practitioners, which will be the subject of the next chapter. This status amplified uncertainty and opportunism, and modified the responsibility for performance attributable to the capabilities of the practitioners. The organisations and their practitioners were often carried along in a tide of others' creation, and their attempts to explain their intentions and beliefs must be understood with this in mind.

7.3 Activities and projects

The activities carried out in the organisations may broadly be designated as fulfilling three functions: direct service, information and pressure, and maintenance. The first function refers to services offered by the organisation directly to the intended beneficiaries, of whom the most obvious category is unemployed people. Besides these, the organisations in this study frequently collaborated with and gave help to other organisations seen to have similar or complementary objectives to their own.

The second function centres round circulating information and bringing influence to bear in those quarters seen to be relevant to addressing the wider problems of unemployment. In common with voluntary action generally, the organisations in this study tended to harbour the view that drawing the problems they were dealing with to wider public attention is at least as important as providing direct services to affected individuals.

The third function comprises what needs to be done internally to enable the organisation and the individuals within it to continue in operation. This includes internal decision making processes, the management of the agency's resources, and

support and encouragement. It also covers what the organisation must do in order to cope with external opportunities and threats. We have seen from the previous section that the organisations occupied a parlous position, and consequently considerable energy had to be devoted to the business of building external credibility and above all, securing continued funding. While the objects of maintenance activities were varied, within a particular organisation their form and locus were often similar whether the issues were internal or external. Generally speaking, responsibility rested largely with the key professional staff, but was shared to varying degrees with the committee.

The activities of direct service, and information and pressure, can in turn be divided into developmental and operational phases. Development refers to the processes of investigating possible needs and opportunities, establishing working contacts, seeking resources, generating support for an idea, and so on. The operational phase is reached when an activity is brought to a relatively stable form of regular operation. Inevitably, many ideas are entertained or partly explored which do not in the end come to fruition. This need not at all mean that the work is wasted, since it adds to the store of knowledge and experience and informs the pursuit of new schemes.

In practice the functions identified here are not carried on discretely, but are intimately intermingled. For example, where there is any form of drop-in centre or open door operation, support and instruction to staff may be given simultaneously with advice to users. Or a regular committee meeting may deal with future planning and development issues, the mechanics of pressing the organisation's cause in the wider public arena, and the day-to-day business of keeping the organisation running. Equally, there is often no categorical distinction to be made between innovative development and routine service delivery. However, it will assist the task of sketching the dynamics of organisational activity to adopt the functional classification proposed here.

As already indicated, the organisations' service activities were those which the survey had led one to expect. However, the survey does not reveal the relative importance of the various activities for any organisation at a given time; nor does it show the relative importance of a number of activities which are not specifically unemployment-related but which took up a large proportion of some of the organisations' resources. Although the field studies were not designed to quantify the various activities or the resources devoted to them, the observations made do strongly suggest that at any given time most of the organisations were seriously involved in far fewer service and development activities than might be supposed by assuming that the global pattern of activities

revealed in the survey (cf. Fig. 5.12) was reproduced in microcosm within each individual organisation. In keeping with the findings of the survey, the organisations covered in the field studies mostly had only a handful (less than five) of staff and of those who had more than this, in all except one case the staff were mostly young or unskilled workers on temporary schemes. Owing to limitations in both the quantity and quality of their workforce therefore, the organisations were only able to sustain a serious capacity in a small range of work at any one time.

In the remainder of this section I shall describe the main features of the organisations' service, development and maintenance activities as they were at the times of my visits. The aim here is not to provide a full catalogue, but rather to amplify what has already been implied: that the organisations constantly had to reconcile a virtually unlimited potential demand for their services, and their own large ambitions, with a very small resource base and a limited range of expertise.

The two unemployed workers' centres had many points of similarity in their general aims and orientation, but differed in their stage of development. In both cases individual advice work was given a very high priority as the basic, central service activity. This covered not only welfare benefits problems but a wide range of concerns presented by people who while generally not in employment, were not necessarily unemployed by the official definition. In one centre this advice work was the only major current service activity while in the other, it took pride of place alongside a range of other activities; the staff believed that theirs was the best advice service in the area. Advice was not necessarily to be seen as something given to users by staff, but could also be delivered through facilitating users to share problems with each other. It seemed, on the basis of workers' statements about what they were trying to provide and users' attitudes, that users chose the advice service provided by the unemployed workers' centres for various reasons including its perceived informal, unofficial style; its evident freedom from association with formal bureaucracies such as the DHSS, fuel boards and social work departments, of which many users had frustrating experience and to which it might provide an independent advocate; or perhaps merely because it was known about and relatively convenient. The workers saw it as their task to pursue users' grievances with other organisations, and they showed evidence of a sophisticated knowledge of the benefits system and other areas of applied social policy and civil law which often impinge on the lives of poorer people. In one of the centres, a number of volunteers had been recruited and informally trained to help provide the advice service.

The centres' aims were not, however, restricted to relieving individual cases of hardship by providing an advice service. Both centres wished to provide social, educational and cultural activities such as a drop-in recreational facility, to relieve the stress, frustration and loss of social contact associated with unemployment; activity and craft groups; a writers' workshop; setting up unemployed groups and women's groups; linking with other community organisations; providing some sort of opportunity for vocational, basic skills, and general education; and so on. The extent to which such activities were actually available varied between the two centres, which differed in their resources, scale of operation and stage of development. These opportunities could also be made available by referring individuals to appropriate places as well as by the centres themselves providing them. The third element that can be distinguished is that of employment creation by non conventional means such as cooperatives and community businesses. The fourth element envisages some barely defined political support of trade unions and other bodies over the issue of unemployment; but any political work had to be kept within the bounds that were thought to be acceptable to funding bodies. In all cases these ends might be pursued not only directly by centre staff and with centre users, but also by fostering independent groups and initiatives with similar aims.

Much of the work that the centres envisaged or carried out was seen as serving both the direct service delivery and the information and pressure functions. For example, educational work might help to generate more public awareness about unemployment as well as enhance the skills and opportunities of participants. One of the centres gave considerable effort to producing a range of publications including a regular newsletter, a guide to living on benefits and a guide for those aspiring to self-employment; these are all examples of projects which serve both ends. Another example was a concessions scheme, which enabled unwaged people to claim discounts for certain goods and services. Besides being of direct benefit to the individual, the scheme was seen as raising public awareness of unemployment.

As already implied, the two centres differed in the extent to which they had realised these ambitions. In one case, the organiser's key preoccupation was a major piece of development work which, it was hoped, would lead to the building and staff resources necessary to enable the centre to offer educational and cultural activities of the kind referred to above. There was an atmosphere of incipient adventure and experiment; many ideas were being explored, not all of them capable of implementation in the near future, or even at all. Debate and planning for the support and funding of the new venture absorbed much of the organisation's resources.

The other centre had completed several major development phases and was more concerned with maintaining its various service and information activities, and indeed its financial security. There was a diverse range of projects of the kinds referred to above and a large, but often underskilled and poorly motivated staff. Senior staff recognised a current 'lack of momentum', of being 'on a plateau'.

The maintenance activities of the two centres naturally reflected their differing stages of development and scales of activity. In the developing centre, internal maintenance was mostly a matter of the organiser supporting the paid and volunteer advice workers by several informal means: taking a personal interest in cases, giving pertinent information and advice on points of procedure, praising achievements, commiserating when problems seemed intractable. A sharing and supportive atmosphere was encouraged in the office, and staff problems might just as easily be the focus of attention as users' problems. The formal decision making forum however was dominated by non staff members, and its role in maintenance was decidedly ambiguous because of external vested interests. In relation to the external environment, the key worker had to maintain a close but unequal relationship with certain powerful individuals, on whose favour the entire future of the project and the worker's own position depended.

At the second centre internal maintenance activities seemed to consist substantially of the senior staff asserting and reinforcing the control they had established over a long period of time, with respect to different staff and user groups and over a wide range of issues. The ghosts of past disputes patrolled territorial and symbolic boundaries. There were large disparities between the ostensive functions of different meetings and the reality. While on a superficial contact the centre gave an impression of activity and bustle, longer acquaintance revealed that many of the staff were poorly motivated and underemployed and managed this situation by dissimulation. Some considerable resentment had been caused by senior staff's heavy involvements outwith the centre, and consequent unavailability to give advice and share responsibility for decisions; but the other side of this was that these external involvements had enormously strengthened the centre's position and the power of its key workers.

The two councils for voluntary service shared with the unemployed workers' centres the attribute of a diffuse and ill-defined set of service and information objectives, but the respective content was quite different. Direct service activities were supposedly incidental rather than intrinsic features of their work; their main role was seen to lie

with other voluntary organisations rather than with the eventual beneficiaries of voluntary action such as people affected by poverty, unemployment, disability, etc. Insofar as a c.v.s. can be said to have direct service functions, these are in relation to other organisations. For example, they may offer advice on fundraising. For all that, one of the councils for voluntary service did in fact undertake responsibility for sponsoring a large number of temporary employment schemes, and had appointed a staff member with specific responsibility to oversee the management of them. It had become very heavily involved with servicing a range of social care projects which, while nominally sponsored by other voluntary organisations, required much time and attention from its own staff. As for the other c.v.s., it too devoted much of its resources to helping other other voluntary organisations set up and manage an impressive range of fairly conventional social service projects undertaken through temporary work schemes and through conventional voluntary activity. The senior worker was often in demand to give advice to a wide range of groups, not necessarily voluntary organisations as such, on a variety of topics. The c.v.s. also operated a small pool of volunteers.

In effect therefore, the councils for voluntary service found themselves with a degree of operational responsibility but at one remove for direct service projects which were often, though by no means exclusively, intended to address the consequences of unemployment. Although neither organisation was completely satisfied with this state of affairs, it felt itself to be drawn in by the needs of projects. At the times of my contacts, one of the organisations was still very active in assisting with developing new projects of this type; but the other had reached the point where support to projects was a largely routine service activity, and was beginning to question how much longer this commitment should be maintained.

Both the councils for voluntary service also carried out a support and development role more purely directed towards the needs of other organisations themselves, as opposed to the operational programmes of those organisations. The contractual basis of this relationship was usually obscure. It seemed that on occasion the organisations most needing external intervention might be the least likely to seek it from a c.v.s. worker. In one situation, a c.v.s. had set up a new organisation to complement its own work, but then had to deal with the new organisation's partial repudiation of the terms of the partnership originally envisaged. Sometimes, where a c.v.s. worker exerted influence, this might be through the use of a position on the committee originally arranged with some other purpose, such as 'liaison', or no clear purpose at all, in mind. C.v.s. workers saw it as valuable to maintain active contacts with as wide a range as possible of

voluntary organisations, and consciously used the practical services which they could offer - such as duplicating and office facilities - as a means of initiating and keeping contacts going. Commenting generally on the unclear purposes of the c.v.s., one worker likened it to an octopus - many tentacles but a mushy centre.

The information and pressure functions are embedded in the very concept of a council for voluntary service. Neither of the bodies in this study were noticeably effective as the collective voice of local voluntarism in relation, for example, to the local authority. However, their senior staff did occupy positions of influence in relation to local initiatives relevant to unemployment. In other words, the councils as collective bodies seemed to be relatively impotent, but their existence gave a certain legitimacy to the effectively personal initiatives which their staff might choose to undertake with the support or tacit consent of their committee. Sometimes the vehicle chosen for exerting pressure would be a new 'front' organisation which eventually would be floated off as a separate body. As for communication to and within the voluntary sector, the councils did appear to carry out a function by the use of more formal devices such as a newsletter, and less formally through the grapevine, which was valued by the organisations it reached. Both the councils compiled a local directory of voluntary organisations. It is not possible to estimate from this study how widely or deeply this networking activity extended.

The organisational maintenance function was carried out very differently in the two councils of voluntary service, reflecting their very different status and traditions, and their different staff complements. One had been established for decades, and had been through many cycles of development and stabilisation of service delivery. There was every sign that a major new cycle in this process was imminent, resulting from a changing funding environment and a growing sense of uncertainty about purpose and direction. The other c.v.s. was relatively in early youth; the current secretary was the original incumbent of the post, and the organisation's aims were comparatively uncomplicated.

Maintenance activities of staff in the former c.v.s. were dominated by a series of interlocking ambiguities. There were large disparities between the nominal tasks of members of staff, and the roles they actually performed both within the organisation and in relation to outside activities. Obvious issues were avoided, and fictions were maintained, in ways which were sometimes counterproductive. Different valuations and opinions of agency activities were often not acknowledged at the apposite moment,

but were referred to elsewhere when it was difficult to address the issue constructively. Formal clarification and decision making mechanisms tended not to produce definite conclusions, creating further ambiguities rather than operational decisions. There were two main reasons for this complicated state of affairs. Firstly, the organisation was being faced with major readjustments in its priorities and patterns of activity in response to a changing environment and the approaching obsolescence of established activities. This generated a climate of uncertainty, laced with apprehension. Secondly, there were chronic issues over staff roles, responsibilities and working relationships, coupled with a lack of an effective means for resolving them.

Organisational maintenance in the second c.v.s. had a completely different aspect since the organiser was the only professional member of staff and had been employed since the organisation's inception. What developed in these circumstances was a highly individualised way of working, in which the dominant influence was the organiser's considerable personal capacity for offering helpful consultation and working relationships with a wide range of individuals in the voluntary sector both within and outwith the c.v.s. itself. Although the day to day running seemed outwardly slightly chaotic, integrity of purpose was ensured by the organiser's strong if not always explicit sense of direction. As regards the organisation's paid staff, this was a one-person band in which the player at least intuitively understood all the parts.

By contrast with the councils of voluntary service, the volunteer bureaux adopted more restricted and definite functions. The major service activity at both centres comprised the recruitment and placement, or 'matching', of potential volunteers in community projects, usually but not invariably sponsored by an organisation other than the bureau itself. There are two sides to this process: attracting, interviewing and placing the volunteers, and arranging openings for them with community groups. Generally speaking the process is governed by the numbers and interests of volunteers coming forward rather than the requirements of voluntary organisations who may wish to use them. Upon placement, volunteers are given a specific member of the bureau staff whom they may refer to if there are any problems.

The two bureaux did not keep comparable or complete records of the processing of volunteers, but it may be interesting to comment as far as the data allow on the scale of the operation. In one case about 500-600 potential new volunteers were seen per annum, and of these around 400 were placed. Of the nearly 200 currently active volunteers, 90% were registered unemployed and quite a few of the remainder were

non-employed. The majority were under 25. At the time of my visits there were over 100 current vacancies. The workers believed that the very high proportion of unemployed volunteers might be partly attributable to the fact that their town centre office was open during normal office hours, so that employed potential volunteers probably looked for another more convenient avenue such as any one of hundreds of traditional voluntary organisations. It might also be the case that there is a high proportion of the less socially skilled amongst the unemployed, who are less able to find voluntary work without the intermediary of a bureau. The largest single category of interest expressed by potential volunteers was practical work; the project workers believed that this was particularly suitable for volunteers who were lacking in confidence and unable to make long term commitments. At this bureau 27% of the currently active volunteers were involved with mentally handicapped people, and 18% on practical work; none of the 18 or so other categories of activity comprised more than 10%.

Systematic data on volunteers were sparse at the second bureau. It was reckoned that 86 volunteers were currently active in a spread of some 20 categories of activity, mostly involving placement with various local voluntary organisations. Most volunteers were unemployed.

Both bureaux regarded it as important to support volunteers once placed. This took several forms, such as encouraging them to come in to see their organiser for a chat, group meetings, and social events.

The process of encouraging volunteering tended to start with a development phase, where workers aimed to explain the bureau's function and stimulate people to come forward. Later, as the bureau became known, the need for active recruitment tended to fall away as the number of interested people rose to the level that the bureau could comfortably cope with. However, the complementary process of encouraging voluntary and community projects to create opportunities for volunteers was a kind of development work which had to be maintained indefinitely. One well established bureau reckoned to have made 45 presentations on the work of the bureau to over 650 people during the course of a year. One worker had visited 84 different agencies in an eight month period, and maintained contact with 45 of them. This work of developing opportunities could be done as part of the normal process of maintaining a working link with organisations where volunteers were currently placed, which was seen as very important.

Although volunteer recruitment, placement and support was seen as the central function, neither bureau confined itself to these activities. In one case the terms of the funding required that the bureau's own employees should spend half their time undergoing training. The staff also actively looked for opportunities to set up new local community projects such as clubs for certain groups, a thrift shop or welfare rights service. At the other bureau considerable energy went on disseminating advice and information to other voluntary organisations on the subject of volunteering.

The internal organisational maintenance functions largely revolved round management of the processes of volunteer recruitment, interviewing, training and placement, and of developing good links with other voluntary organisations. In one case the organiser had responsibility for a relatively large but mostly inexperienced and indifferently motivated workforce, with very different levels of skill. There was little support to be had from the notional committee. At the other bureau, the senior worker had successfully created a house style and fostered a team spirit which enabled staff to work confidently, cooperatively and effectively. In both cases, the senior workers relied primarily upon informal methods to give support and exert leadership and control; this was done through the medium of ordinary daily interaction in the workplace. The other kind of maintenance issue which preoccupied both organisers was the major problem of ensuring continued funding, and on acceptable terms. Insecurity of funding overshadowed everything else, particularly when current funding was coming to an end and a new and possibly unwelcome contract was in the offing. The bureau organisers shouldered the major responsibility and worry almost unaided.

The remaining pair of organisations both aimed to increase employment, and used a combination of two approaches. Firstly, by giving direct help and support to individuals they aimed to increase their employability or their chances of success in the open market. By means of training programmes, personal advice and various forms of structured work experience it was hoped that participants would become more successful in seeking jobs and keeping them, or in running some enterprise of their own. This approach was based on the premiss that with support and training people could be better fitted for changing patterns of employment opportunity; in particular, the skills and attitudes that had grown up in local communities as a result of decades of involvement in traditional heavy industry were seen to be obsolete and in need of replacement by attitudes appropriate to new consumer-conscious service and light manufacturing industries. Secondly, the two organisations wished to encourage new forms of productive enterprise. Here the focus was on developing new and sometimes

novel organisations which would play a significant role in employment creation and fostering a climate of enterprise.

The two organisations differed in the emphasis they gave to these two approaches. In one case the main effort went into running a broad spectrum of training programmes backed by support and advice on an individual basis, the latter provided both formally and informally. In effect it was a service agency for delivering training programmes, and it did so at consistently high volume. The service began by attracting unemployed people to take up its facilities. The agency claimed to have enabled hundreds of individuals (precise figures were quoted) to find permanent jobs or set up in some form of business. While some acknowledgement was given to developing new community and business organisations - an objective which had figured strongly in the original thinking of the instigators of the project - this was a relatively insignificant part of the total operation at the time of my contact. The main emphasis in this agency therefore was service delivery. Such development work as was undertaken was mostly in preparation for the next generation of training and advice programmes; new and redesigned programmes were introduced relatively frequently.

The other agency, by contrast, focused mostly on development work with local community organisations. Its main preoccupation was trying to set up community businesses with the active commitment of local individuals and groups. It did also act as a service organisation to a handful of new traditional local businesses. The main development work was proving to be a real struggle, and the organisation was almost universally criticised for having achieved very little in the way of tangible results.

The contrast between the two agencies is of some interest since although they operated in very different environments, with different opportunities and with staff of different skills and aspirations, they both shared a notional interest in fostering new forms of enterprise in the community. Both were also of approximately the same age, three or four years, at the time of my contacts. In one case, the organisation had laboured on in unpropitious circumstances with staff who were out of their depth, in the attempt to realise a concept of community enterprise whose viability in the conditions of the project must be seriously open to question. The problems were exacerbated by the highly treacherous political situation in which the project had to operate. In the other case, the grave difficulties which that organisation had also encountered in trying to implement a rather similar ideology were dealt with much more pragmatically. In effect much of the original aspiration to foster a new spirit of enterprise rooted in

community action had been quietly dropped in favour of service provision for which substantial resources were forthcoming. The latter organisation was felt by knowledgeable outsiders involved in its formation to have lost sight of its original and proper purposes.

Organisational maintenance in the two organisations reflected the different natures of the programmes. The service organisation had a relatively large staff with a hierarchic structure, and an ethos of management efficiency, cost control and output targets. Its style of operation resembled that of a small business, and contrasted markedly with that of the traditional small voluntary organisation. The staff in general approved of the regime under a new director, which was felt to be much superior to the one that had prevailed previously. In the development organisation however, organisational maintenance had so inflated as to become the primary preoccupation of the senior staff, at the expense of externally directed productive activities. It took the form of endless debates, tensions and disagreements within the staff and committee groups. This can be ascribed to the doubts and difficulties inevitably ensuing from a perceived lack of success in achieving the outputs desired.

We may close this overview of the organisations' activities by comparing the findings of the field studies with the conclusions of the survey detailed in Chapter 5. It was argued there that two broad ideologies could be distinguished in the field of voluntary action on unemployment, designated the 'welfare' and 'prevention' ideologies. The field studies support the interpretation that there exist these two general orientations to action on unemployment, but that in the arenas of practice they coexist and intermingle. In general the practitioners had some degree of sympathy for, and some practical commitment to, both camps, while recognisably preferring to give more emphasis to one or the other in their own work. The pattern of preferences is related to the type of organisation.

The councils of voluntary service and the volunteer bureaux covered in the field studies are typical of their respective organisation type in that they were committed to the welfare model. Indeed they were typical organisations of the traditional voluntary sector with its deep roots of welfare work, and they carried the language and culture of that tradition. Nevertheless they clearly recognised that unemployment presented a new challenge, and they sought to adapt the welfare tradition to provide an appropriate response to the problems of unemployment. Partly because of this, and partly through sheer force of circumstances beyond their control, a very large part of their current

work in fact had a direct impact on the welfare of people who were unemployed, or would otherwise have been unemployed.

The unemployed workers' centres in the field studies also reflected the findings of the survey in that they carried an allegiance to both the welfare and the prevention models, and they had some degree of difficulty in reconciling the two. Thus, while they espoused visions of a new, socialist, social order in which among other things social enterprise would eradicate unemployment, their daily reality was more concerned with the essentially conservative business of securing welfare rights, and with fairly low grade counselling, recreational and educational activities. The unemployed workers' centres spoke the language of traditional trade unionism, the Labour Party, and postwar public service; they represented one attempt of that tradition to adapt to the new and hostile climate of the 1980's.

The business and employment development organisations were, again in keeping with the survey findings, clearly committed to the prevention model of responding to unemployment; for them it was axiomatic that the most important way to help individuals affected by unemployment was to offer and create opportunities to get them out of that condition. These organisations spoke the language of business and enterprise and had a market-oriented philosophy which evidently reflects new prevailing forces in public life. Like the other organisations however, they had to make substantial compromises for the sake of viability in a turbulent environment.

CHAPTER 8

The content of practitioners' beliefs and dispositions

8.1 Introduction

The main focus in this chapter is on the origin and nature of practitioners' beliefs relevant to their work. It is not intended to comprise a systematic description of the work itself, which has already been covered elsewhere. The aim rather is to identify and demonstrate the influences, and processes, which led to practitioners being inclined to hold those attitudes and beliefs which strongly conditioned, or described, their way of dealing with their work. While therefore the direct and indirect narrative will from time to time incidentally describe or illustrate work activities, the material has been selected for what it says about practitioners' understanding rather than for its representativeness of the activities carried on in the organisations.

The analysis is based on the presumption that practitioners (and people in general) are neither as flotsam completely at the mercy of the current of external forces and events, both past and present: nor are they entirely the authors of their fate. While external forces, as we have seen in the previous chapter, are undoubtedly of major significance, so also is the individual's personal and unique construction of the situation in which he finds himself. The way in which an individual acts has to be understood by comparison with the experiences to which he has been subjected, and the imprint of those experiences which include the product of his having responded as an active and knowing subject. The individual's experience is not only something which happens to him, but something he also creates for himself in the process of dealing with the world around him. While therefore I shall often interpret the actions of practitioners as the outcome (in part) of their biography, biography is not to be understood as a mere concatenation of external events but as a process necessarily created and constantly re-created by the individual by his construction of his experience.

In more detailed and operational terms, the present chapter comprises a thematic exposition of the principal content of the field studies as derived from data collected

under the practitioner-related operational constructs. A number of major topics have been selected and abstracted from the volume of notes, records, documents and transcripts which qualitative research inevitably generates. Necessarily therefore, much has had to be left behind in the distillation process. The material presented here has been selected on the basis that the theme involved is generally found to have occupied an important place in the practitioners' knowledge and understanding; volume and saliency have been major factors in the selection process. Equally, care has been taken to choose material which is representative and typical, unless specifically stated to the contrary. Saliency and representativeness have been procured by use of the analysis carried out under the operational constructs; but for the sake of coherency, further discussion of the constructs and the action model will be left to the next chapter. It will be seen that some of the topics selected (such as education and personal characteristics) would have been expected in any study of practitioners' knowledge and experience, while others (such as unemployment and community development) are specifically relevant to the practice field of this study.

Apart from the considerations just mentioned, another important factor which has determined the presentation of this material should be emphasised at this stage. In order to avoid the risk of inadvertently revealing the identities of the individuals and organisations studied, it has been necessary in the present narrative to refrain from linking observations made of one person under one heading to those made of the same individual under another. Scotland is a small country, and the community of voluntary organisations identified for this research is limited in number but fairly dense in its internal networks. To be too precise about the exact situations encountered in the field studies, or to be too detailed in the comment about individuals and their organisations, would make it relatively easy for a knowledgeable reader to make accurate guesses about which of their acquaintances was being referred to.

It is perhaps arguable that a more graphic way of presenting the findings of this chapter would have been in the form of a series of cases: that is, to examine severally the content and structure of each practitioner's knowledge and skill, and proceed thence to more general inferences. Whatever the attractions of this method in terms of immediacy and realism, it has been ruled out since to adopt it would certainly be incompatible with safeguarding the identities of the individuals and organisations studied. I have therefore elected to present the materials subsumed under a series of general themes, rather than along alternative lines which would incur a greater risk of inadvertent disclosure.

The major themes will be presented in the following sequence. The first section will deal with practitioners' education and previous experience, which together comprise what are generally supposed to be the main sources of a person's qualification and capacity to do a specific job. The second section will be concerned with practitioners' analysis of some of the main social issues they felt they faced in their work; this will show how they understood the social problems their work was directed towards. The third section will examine the working principles which practitioners in the respective types of agency adopted to guide their day to day work. This first group therefore will deal broadly with practitioners' knowledge relevant to their practice.

The fourth section will deal with personal attributes and values, which in social welfare practice at any rate are supposed to be at least as important as the individual's relevant education and experience.

The fifth section will cover the practitioners' action skills. This is a somewhat different enquiry from the foregoing, which deals largely with cognitive structures and beliefs while skill refers to demonstrated capacity to perform certain tasks or actions. Nevertheless an appraisal of skill is necessary to complete the picture of how practitioners 'link theory and practice'. In so doing, the account will complete the trio of knowledge, values and skills which by now constitute the standard conception of the armamentarium of the social worker (CCETSW, 1989).

The final section will examine whether the complex of knowledge, values and skills thus described above could be said to add up to a professional discipline, and will consider the extent of the practitioners' mastery of it.

In the next chapter this material will be re-examined for the light it sheds on the central question of the structure of practitioners' knowledge and understanding.

8.2 Education, training and previous work experience

The fourteen practitioners identified in the field studies were, in general, well qualified; only two held no formal educational qualifications beyond school leaving level and one of these had started but not completed a professional training course. Eight held first degrees and of these, three held higher degrees - two at doctoral level and one at master's. There were four holders of the social work qualification of CQSW or its

equivalent, and two of community education certificates; in addition, three practitioners held degree or vocational qualifications in the business studies area. Most of the practitioners had attended a number of short courses and conferences on topics relevant to their work.

The practitioners often related their current practice to their formal education, almost irrespective of whether, in the case of graduates, it had been in arts, sciences or social sciences, or pure or applied; and in the case of holders of vocational qualifications, whether their qualifications would generally be seen as relevant or not to their jobs. Almost invariably however, practitioners would refer to the perspective or general awareness that they had gained as a result of following a course of study, rather than to the precise application of any explicitly defined body of knowledge.

A worker in a volunteer bureau drew on his training and industrial experience in personnel work to inform his awareness of the threat that a volunteer might pose to a voluntary organisation:

Worker One of the difficulties that I found I had to come to terms with was the fact that some volunteers coming in were a lot better at the job than I was and there is always the temptation to recruit people below your level of achievement so you are not threatened and I hadn't seen this before in going into a place as a volunteer that my ability or how I projected myself might present a threat to the organisation.

The following exchange shows something of what the worker had absorbed from academic study, and also illustrates how weak may be the distinction between someone's academic knowledge and their personal values. We had been discussing the interviewee's relatively recent social work training:

CC What was the book learning that stands out for you at this distance?

Worker I found myself quite interested in sociology and psychology, more than anything else. I like to know what makes people tick; I like to know what people were likely to do in a situation and why that was so but, having said that, I don't go along with any one ideology. As regards a psychologist comes forward with a theory, I was sometimes afraid that you would make the circumstances fit the theory and I was always very wary about that. So I could never say, yeh, I believe this implicitly, I like to say yeh, I believe that but I also believe that by someone else.

CC Whose theories do you remember, or what theory do you remember?

Worker Well names I am very bad at . . .

CC Well, never mind the names.

Worker In some ways, self actualisation. I think there are circumstances where people do things and you can almost see a progression but then again, I sort of draw back at the last minute from that, because you could say that if people have the right to self actualisation or if they are moving along that path, you would also be saying, well they have the decision, they can make the decision and nobody should counter it that they should take their own life and I am against that, you know what I mean. I think that's wrong, I don't think any sane person should do that.

A worker who had taken her degree in social anthropology some years previously still recalled her course with interest and enthusiasm. I asked if this seemed relevant to her work:

CC Were there things that you brought from your academic study that you found useful, or still find useful?

Worker Oh, aye - and it's unconsciously. I wouldnae say that I sit down and I think I must apply this . . . theory. But what that conditioned me to think about, I think, was that communities operate, rather than individuals - sort of community pressures, and peer group pressures And I think that's probably made me a more viable community worker than a social worker.

The same worker described how her dissertation had been about personality and subculture; why some people from the working class become delinquent, and others do not; and how a working class subculture develops with its strengths and weaknesses.

A worker who had done a community education certificate vividly recalled the experience of a 'community relations/group relations' course, although she had difficulty in explaining the content:

Worker It was really about getting into your mind, mixing you up, spitting you out. It really was, it was playing games with your mind. That was part of the course, that was why they kept you in a residential situation. It was a lot of role playing It was a lot about breaking down your defences.

A worker who had attended a short course on counselling recalled that experience in rather similar terms:

Worker The counselling course was very good because it made me become more aware of myself and I think it sort of shatters the design the individual has of themselves, of how they really think they are and this is all broken down and you have to remould yourself into what you are really like. And I think it helps you to be more aware of other people and their

feelings and shortcomings.

Other workers shared the feeling that the total experience of being a student on a course was at least as, if not much more significant, than the academic learning acquired. A worker who had left his career in business at a relatively mature age to go to college put it as follows:

CC In what ways were your courses helpful to the job that you do here?

Worker (Wry laughter)

CC What did you learn that was any use to you?

Worker Not a lot! This'll sound arrogant, but I didn't learn a lot on the HND course that I didn't know before. Maybe I learned it a little bit more depth, a lot more stylised, a lot more structured. But in addition to that, I didn't really learn a lot. What it did do was change me as an individual, and that's what's helped me more than anything. Because before I went on that course I'm very much - I still am - very much a shy person. But the college course broadened me out, it changed my outlook on life, it changed my ability to be able to speak to people. It really did change me, because I went in very much a straight line free enterprise capitalist with possible radical sidetracks. Came out with a great more sympathy for people, great more understanding of people, and an ability to communicate and talk to people at different levels. Because I was stuck in there at [age late thirties] with people of 20 and dealing with lecturers in some cases who were younger than I was.

A worker with a strong academic background in urban social geography had, through his studies and wider experience, developed a sophisticated understanding of the politics and economics of unemployment. He used this to inform his analysis of what might be useful and feasible activities for his agency, and was clear too about the agency's limitations. Similarly, another worker used his professional qualification and experience in planning to develop a socio-economic analysis of unemployment, and had traced the implications for the the potential programmes of his agency.

As the practitioners perceived it then, the value of education is not primarily for the direct relevance of detailed course content to the daily exigencies of their job. If the detailed knowledge is remembered at all, it is often in a passive rather than an active form: it may be recognised if offered back, but the practitioner is not able to apply this passive knowledge spontaneously to practical situations. What does survive much more strongly is some degree of understanding of the approach and discipline underlying a course, rather than the minutiae of content. Interestingly, it could not be

inferred from this small sample that the perceived usefulness of a course of study was related in any obvious way to its closeness or otherwise to the practitioner's current field of work. Some practitioners whose studies had been in fields remote from social welfare nevertheless made imaginative use of their educational background in their current position; others, who by virtue of training in social work, community education or business, might have been expected to demonstrate a more certain command of relevant areas of knowledge, visibly faltered when asked to do so.

It might seem from this finding that formal schooling has little impact on social welfare practice, but such a conclusion is unwarranted. In the first place, it is certainly arguable that an understanding of basic issues, and the ability to apply a logic and a discipline to practical endeavours are more important and useful than mere factual knowledge which is inevitably limited, and forever obsolescent. The point is sometimes put by saying that education matters more than training. In the second place, it has to be acknowledged that there exists no training specifically designed for the kinds of work covered in this study, and one cannot therefore expect practitioners to have acquired much of the necessary expertise by means of academic study. Voluntary action on unemployment is on the whole peripheral to the occupations which mostly supply its practitioners.

The significance of practitioners' previous work and other experience was likewise considerable, but again there was no obvious relationship between the content and context of their experience and its value for their present job. All the practitioners were easily able to identify aspects of their previous experience which they valued highly for relevance to their job, despite the great range represented in the sample. Some brought experience in industry, whether at shop floor or management level; some had worked in other areas of social welfare, including direct practice with needy individuals, in income maintenance and in community organisation; some had worked almost entirely in small voluntary organisations, others in large public bureaucracies; some had experience in formal or informal education.

A worker found her previous experience of supervising a job creation scheme invaluable in the managerial aspect of her current role as a volunteer organiser:

Worker I think my years at [previous job] matured me, developed me and brought out a lot of potential in me that, you know, I was really quite a shy, reserved individual. Folk laugh when I say that but I was and I never liked to be in the forefront. [...] I was very fortunate that I had a boss who saw potential in me and worked on that potential and brought me to

the point that I was two years ago able to get [present job].

A worker in an unemployed workers' centre drew on her years of experience on the shop floor in industry and as an voluntary activist in her local community. In industry she had become involved in trade union work and had acquired the knowledge, attitudes and personal contacts which, more than her training in community education, fitted her for her present role. As a voluntary worker before her training she realised that she had been acting 'intuitively', i.e. without demonstrable reference to any formal body of knowledge. She considered that her college experience acted to reinforce the 'intuitive' behaviour: 'I've probably been doing community work all my life!'

A worker who had had many years' experience in an administrative capacity in local government was certain that this had been valuable when she later went into social work:

Worker It is all very well being pie in the sky about lots of things but people that you have as clients if you like, aren't concerned about what you are feeling, they are concerned about what's going to happen to them in the here and now. [...] I think also like during my previous working life, you do get to be able to talk to people, and to listen to people and I think that's important. [...] And if you are working in a public office as I was and acting as a sort of buffer between the top end and the general public, you began to pick up a lot of skills in how to talk to people, how to respond to people.

CC Like negotiation or ...

Worker Oh yes, very much so and not just negotiation, you were the person in the middle that, if you like, turned away wrath. You might find that you were dealing with somebody that was really uptight and they wanted to see the person in charge or whatever. Until you know what the problem is, you don't know where to put them on.

A worker in a council for voluntary service similarly identified aspects of her experience as a social worker which had equipped her with relevant skills:

Worker Social work also taught me to use my contacts, use a bit of native cunning, take short cuts. [...] Not feeding on people, but using their knowledge rather than having to go away and obtain that knowledge for yourself. Social work also taught me something to do with networking, which is also relevant in community work. Using personalities, conflict, dynamics.

On occasion a worker would comment that their previous experience was significant for their present situation not because of the similarities between the two, but because of

the contrasts. One worker was unsure how she would deal with the larger load of vaguely defined 'development' work which she was being expected to take on:

Worker I've been a bit perturbed by this - again it is something to do with the fact that I have almost a stereotyped work experience where I had simply slotted into a department and simply do teaching, this, that and the other. I find it very disconcerting when, really what is happening at the moment, is I am being asked to create my own job because I don't feel I have the experience to do that. I mean I can come up with ideas but really what I want is to feel that I am fulfilling a need within the organisation, rather than my kind of casting around to find various tasks for me to do.

Finally it should be mentioned that some of the workers brought some degree of local knowledge from their previous experience which they found relevant to their current job. This might for example be through residence in the area, or by having worked in another agency through which they had come to know about their current concerns in another capacity. Knowing the 'scene' and some of the important actors was valuable contextual knowledge which workers felt gave them an insight into local systems of power and influence, or an appreciation of the capacities and proclivities of those they now had to deal with.

8.3 Making sense of the issues

This section will present evidence about the way practitioners understood several of the key issues they had to deal with in their work. It is organised around two themes: unemployment and community.

8.3.1 Unemployment: effects and remedies

It was explained in the previous chapter that all the agencies covered in the field studies proved to be heavily involved in working with unemployed people, or in projects designed to respond to unemployment. This was true even in those cases where responding to unemployment was not defined as a central objective of the organisation. As might be expected therefore, the practitioners generally had clear and sometimes strongly felt views about the nature of unemployment. While their views were highly consistent with the understanding of the effects of unemployment which may be had from the academic literature, it seemed that in general they had built up their

knowledge mostly from work and personal experience and popular sources such as the news media. In explaining what they thought or felt, they mostly relied upon their direct experience and upon common sense ideas and explanations having a wide general currency; they did not cite from the fast growing non-ephemeral general, professional and academic literature about unemployment, although it is more than probable that academic analyses had entered unbeknown into their understanding via ordinary public discourse. This appears to be similar to the reported tendency of most social workers not to read relevant research reports after training (cf. Carew, 1979), but to rely instead on what they learn through contact with colleagues, from trade magazines, and the like.

No-one doubts the deleterious effects of unemployment both for the individual and the wider society. As one worker with personal experience put it,

Worker Unemployment's dreadful. It's a social cancer. It destroys people. Another echoed this sentiment:

Worker Unemployment's bad, dreadful to have to live with.

A third spoke with feeling about the 'yoke of unemployment'. Another described unemployment as 'unacceptable to society'.

The primary effect of unemployment is poverty. While this is recognised as a serious threat to the individual's economic and physical welfare, it is the concomitant social effects which are seen as the more insidious and difficult to handle. The unemployed person cannot afford ordinary social activities, and therefore withdraws; the resulting isolation exacerbates the loss of social contact at the workplace. The unemployed person becomes socially 'invisible'; their status is stigmatised. One worker described this as follows:

Worker Unemployment is a debilitating thing psychologically. It is also a very alienating thing within society because the first thing you ask anybody you haven't seen for a couple of years is what are you doing these days, what job you're working at. So you get to the stage of when you are unemployed, and I know I have been unemployed myself, you avoid people. You see someone coming, you look in a shop window or go in a door, that is very common and that happens everywhere.

The confidence of the unemployed person is low; they feel 'worthless'; their self esteem 'shattered'; apathy, boredom and depression set in. Young people who have never held a job are deprived of the possibility of forming normal social relationships in an adult milieu; they remain immature and dependent for their age. All these things are likely to create tension within the family, and particularly so in those cultures which retain a

highly traditional concept of men's role as breadwinners.

The notion of improving unemployed people's confidence, morale and skills lay behind much activity in all the agencies, reflecting the belief that these are central issues. As previously described, the unemployed workers' centres ran a variety of social and cultural activities which were seen as relevant to reducing isolation, boredom, apathy and related maladies, while other activities might have a specific educational function. In the volunteer bureaux, voluntary work was seen as a means of reducing social isolation, improving one's skills, and so on. As one volunteer bureau worker described it,

Worker My role is a contact worker for those recovering from mental illness, and the long term unemployed. There are a lot of similarities I think between the needs of both groups in the major difficulty for either a patient that is recovering from mental illness or a long term unemployed person is lack of confidence, lack of confidence in self and, therefore, it is quite a slow stepping stone sort of approach if you are going to help either group get back into the community.

From a slightly different perspective, some workers especially in those agencies committed to activities designed to create jobs or improve individuals' employability believed that developing confidence and enhancing skill were essential prerequisites to work-related training. A worker who had considerable experience of carrying out training activities with unemployed people believed that their needs had to be tackled in a progressive fashion:

Worker There is no sense in ... driving people from the middle of [deprived peripheral estate] and saying right, within the next six weeks you will be an entrepreneur and running a business. Likewise there are many strands to the route you can go. You can't take someone from abject low confidence and multiple deprivation and move them the whole length of the possible route and bring them out at the end conventionally running a business and being successful. You might do it at a very great stress seeing that person running a business with a number of people, tens of people, but that is highly unlikely. The most likely thing is that firstly those people at the beginning basically want a job and they need to get the steps that equip them to take that step if they choose. Then the next thing is whether that job might be structured slightly differently and you are maybe looking at cooperatives or community based businesses or something like that. It may then move forward from that to say well some people may wish to continue and actually set up a business but it is a long road. [...]

There are times when helping people re-establish their confidence can be a long uphill struggle and it can be difficult. Equally you can bring

together a group of people who sometimes can produce tremendous magic, a lot of enthusiasm from exactly the same starting points. There are people who have gone through a lot of difficult times and yet have got a lot of hidden talents and capabilities, things that they are not recognising, things that they do recognise but they can't get the other steps. [...] There are some people who can be more quickly helped to find their particular sense of direction. I think basically it comes back to being able to make the choices - but to be enabled to make the choices that suit them.

Another worker however made a link between unemployment and training in somewhat different terms:

Worker I think there are jobs which need doing. There isn't I don't think the political will at the moment to actually implement those kind of jobs and I am thinking of things like infrastructure - that again smacks a bit of the 18th century and 19th century putting people to the roads but I don't think that is the case, I think there is certainly work there. I think the education system has to be improved, I think there are a lot of people who are finding getting existing jobs very difficult as their skills, not necessarily that they don't match, but they just simply don't have the capabilities to adapt their existing skills to what is required. I think training is important but I think it is a pity that things like apprenticeships have sunk in number in comparison with this kind of - what I see as a very sort of peripheral training [on MSC schemes] - I don't think it is training for a livelihood. [...] I think there is wealth and I think there could be jobs and I think it is actually a lack of political will.

Moving then to wider questions of the causes and cures of unemployment, the practitioners generally held fairly conventional, and frequently pessimistic, views regarding the consequences of economic and industrial change. The decline - sometimes gradual, sometimes catastrophic - of traditional heavy industries in the two study areas was seen as leading inevitably to high unemployment at least in the short term:

Worker Very traditional industrial town with most of its eggs in one basket, ... a heavyish kind of industry coming to the end of that particular industry's life and just finding that the whole thing just shudders to a halt over a period of time, leaving a lot of the people without any alternative.

Many felt that this process could have been foreseen at least in part, and that the presumed present problem of a lack of fit between the skills of the labour force and the changing jobs market could have been averted.

Worker The economists were predicting in 1955 the run down, the dramatic reduction of heavy industry in Britain so I think that ... then was the time we should have started training the people in these industries or re-training them to undertake more appropriate tasks. I think we should have also, at that point in time, been quite deliberately reducing the apprenticeships in

heavy industry and re-directing them to new fields as well and we are still not doing that. Five years from now we will again be putting 60 young people in to train as primary school teachers knowing there is only going to be seven jobs at the end of it and it is because it doesn't matter who it is - whitewash is a lot cheaper than actually doing something about it.

Many workers felt that unemployment had to be seen as the result of an interaction between political and economic forces and the skills and capacities of the labour force.

As one said,

Worker On the face of it we do have an ill-equipped workforce but it is, if you like, how do you equip people. Whether you see equipping people as something that is about tools and hardware or about personal capabilities and even beginning to break down that kind of question, because I suppose behind what you are saying is the notion that unemployment is a structural problem, it is there because it happens to suit certain other economic targets I would tend to take the view that there is a balance between the two.

Similar views were expressed in the following conversation:

CC There is, as you know, the official view in government that Britain's economic weakness over many years is due to a poor labour market, the inadequacy of the labour market, do you yourself agree or disagree with that position?

Worker That is part of the story, it is not the whole story and I don't believe you will find many government ministers making that sort of statement. They would say that the problem is a lot more complex than that.

[...]

CC What would be the implications for a project in [agency's local area] designed to address unemployment?

Worker Well you have also got to look at the changing patterns of employment within [the area] and changing patterns or the changing nature of the labour market. [...] The major change ... is the shift away from manufacturing towards the service sector. ... In [local area] like a lot of major cities throughout the UK there isn't really a tradition of service sector employment and that for people to change from working in [traditional industries] either to become highly skilled technicians in the technology, electrical engineering sides, or in the service sector is a major shift and one that has to do with people's attitudes, people's whole traditions, the way they've been brought up in are not best suited to coping.

The practitioners in general were not optimistic about a return to more normal levels of unemployment, with traditional patterns of economic activity and job opportunities.

Debates about the future of work were common currency, often incorporating emergent ideas about the nature of work and leisure, the amount and distribution of work over the individual's life span, the need for flexibility and constant retraining, and the need for new forms of productive organisation to replace the failed models of traditional capitalism (cf. Handy, 1984). This mood does need to be seen against the prevailing state of affairs when the fieldwork was carried out. By the end of 1985 unemployment had risen to around 3.2 million, or 13.2 percent after over 10 years of steep and almost unrelenting increase. A further two thirds of a million were covered by special employment and training measures (Unemployment Unit, 1966). There seemed to be no end in sight, nor any near prospect of a change of national politics which might bring about a change in the levels of, and attitudes to, unemployment.

The seeming failure of capitalism to guarantee continuing employment was a particularly important factor in the motivation of workers involved with community business:

Worker The only way this country's going to get back to anything like an equal society, a fair society, with quality of life equal to people's expectations and the dignity of man - now that maybe all sounds awfully grand words - the only way we're going to get anywhere near that kind of scenario is to give the power back to the people. Give the communities control over what they want to do. And that is where to me, at the top of any community business the ultimate aim is the empowerment of the people. And then it's up to the people to decide what their community needs. Now how do you decide whether it should be job creation, wealth creation or social benefit? I would say it depends on the area that you live in and you work in and what your perceptions of the needs of the area are.

Other workers similarly saw unemployment as something that would require political solutions. One said:

Worker I think it is important to realise that unemployment is not a yoke that will be cast off by the unemployed themselves. It needs the joint action of the whole of the community, politicians, churches, trades unions, street traders - the butcher, the baker, until everyone becomes more aware of what unemployment is and how big a scourge it is on the society, how big a waste it is, nothing is going to be done about it. It needs the united action of the whole of the community to throw it off, to realise that it needs to be thrown off.

However, this political analysis does not preclude remedial action at the local level. A worker in an unemployed workers' centre commented that for the unemployed, participating in centre activities

Worker ... is meeting their individual needs as individuals and they get confidence from coming in here and some training from the groups they participate in and go on to get jobs elsewhere, that's helping them as individuals. It isn't creating any more jobs out there but it is helping them as individuals. [...] On the macro economic side, what we are saying is yes, the big argument is that to raise unemployment as an issue and keep it there among opinion and decision makers within the local economy, and the national economy when it come to that, because they are the people that can really affect things for the majority of the unemployed.

[...]

CC There is an argument and I am sure you know it that this kind of work with the unemployed, even sending out fact sheets and newsletters is actually peripheral, it is messing around at the edges really and it is an economic problem at national level and nothing else will make any difference. That is rather a harsh line but I don't know what you would say to that.

Worker I would agree it is a national issue and national economics is largely where it has got to be solved. However, you can do things locally. The local economy can make a difference to employment locally and I think you have got to keep these issues up. The alternative, this is the nitty gritty, is that people that argue that, what's their alternative? That the people should just go quietly away and die - I mean you don't see them on street corners so therefore let's pretend they don't exist, let's keep them out of mind, let's not worry about them, let it not even be an issue. It is a national issue, forget about it, it is not a local issue and I think that is just an unacceptable point of view. You have got to keep nagging away at people's conscience both locally and nationally and local pressure sometimes applies national pressure.

In summary then, the practitioners saw unemployment as a problem originating in political and economic processes at national, and indeed international, level. Within this framework, they understood that certain individuals in certain situations were more prone to becoming unemployed, or to suffering more severe consequences, or both. The practitioners were not sanguine about the prospects for rapid change in the causative factors of unemployment as they understood them; but they felt it was nevertheless important to try and do something to alleviate the consequences of unemployment at the individual and local level. Some of the practitioners adopted forms of local action which they hoped or believed might have an impact on the wider social and political causes in the longer term.

The practitioners' view of unemployment would, in its broad terms, probably be

accepted by most analysts. The precise interpretations given to it by the various organisations and practitioners are perhaps more debatable, and certainly the priorities attached to various activities are difficult to either validate or dispute by reference to well attested knowledge. It is a matter of, among other things, experience, judgement, and values - all of which may be flawed - to decide which activities are likely to be most profitable in a given set of circumstances. The practitioners lacked textbook precepts to guide them, since in the field in question reliable knowledge for practice is at best only fragmentary. But even where well attested and directly relevant knowledge does exist, as for example of the individual and social consequences of unemployment, the practitioners hardly ever made explicit reference to its sources. They borrowed from it, perhaps unconsciously, with more or less aptitude and accuracy; they expressed it in terms of what they knew from their own experience. The content of their practice suggested that they appreciated the import, to varying degrees, of relevant knowledge; but they often found it problematic to formulate it in the abstract.

The practitioners accepted, with varying degrees of practical commitment, the notion that responding to unemployment should address both the immediate local effects and the underlying causes. Thus they were concerned both to help individuals in immediate need and to build actions to mitigate the magnitude or consequences of unemployment in the future. This combination of direct service and campaign is the classic model for voluntary organisations in the British tradition; it dates back to nineteenth century philanthropic movements and is arguably the dominant model in contemporary voluntary action, represented in the culture and action of countless voluntary bodies. Perhaps surprisingly however, this model lacks a comprehensive and authoritative statement or a broadly based empirical verification. The practitioners in this study had adopted the model, or worked it out from their own experience, in a practical rather than an abstract manner; it received little attention as the abstraction stated here, but nevertheless provided a recognisable rationale for the practitioners' projects.

8.3.2 The local community and ways of life

The practitioners often referred to the character of the community in which they operated, and the ways of its people, as significant factors in shaping their work. Most of the practitioners thought that there existed specific local social characteristics which

made their area if not unique, at least somewhat distinctive. They believed it was necessary to be aware of these factors in carrying out their work.

The sources and bases for practitioners' beliefs about the local community varied from the publicly known and nearly self-evident to much more personal and impressionistic interpretations of their daily experience. At the former extreme, it was for example universally recognised that local levels of unemployment were higher than the prevailing national, and usually regional, levels. The consequences of this for individual and community life were well appreciated. Practitioners immediately made links between wider processes of industrial and political change and the microeconomics of daily life. Also in the realms of hard knowledge, practitioners would whenever it was relevant draw attention to the character and history of housing in a local area; they might deprecate the defects of housing design and lack of local amenities in a peripheral urban estate, or condemn poor standards of repair in notorious industrial villages. In general, the practitioners possessed a good critical knowledge of these and similar aspects of the local communities they were concerned with. This knowledge was that available to any ordinary consumer of the news media, occasionally supplemented by more specialised local research reports and the opinions of informed insiders. The point to note here is that while the content of this understanding was at the level of common knowledge, received opinion, and common sense, the practitioners were nevertheless in general sophisticated users of it; and they were quite able to question some of the 'solutions' being advocated or purveyed by politicians or experts, and to define their own critical opinion.

Many of the practitioners also stated well-defined views about the culture and social attitudes prevalent in their area, which they regarded as important factors in the pursuit of their organisational objectives.

A worker concerned with community business development often bemoaned what he regarded as the lack of an enterprise culture in the local area. He attributed the dominant 'employee mentality' seen to exist in the wake of deindustrialisation to a local history of employment having been provided by a succession of externally sponsored primary and manufacturing industries which had flourished and died. Local people had become accustomed to the idea that jobs would be provided by outside (usually English) entrepreneurs, with or without government encouragement; there was no local tradition of self-responsibility for creating work. The worker cited a number of examples to support a claim that where, against the trend, local people had in fact

established themselves as entrepreneurs, they often marked their success by moving away from the area. Linked to the dominant attitudes were highly traditional expectations of the role of women, who were expected to keep house for their menfolk and carry almost the entire practical responsibility for care of the family.

A worker made the link between employment and a sense of community as follows:

Worker People say oh the good old community spirit, that sort of thing. What the community spirit used to have was a feeling of being purposeful in your life, a sense of worth, a sense of belonging, a sense of being, that has taken away in so many places and people are literally worthless. They don't see themselves of any value.

A worker whose own roots were in the area where she worked made a link between the economic history of the area and the social attitudes in the community. According to this view, people had become accustomed to a system of expectations which allocated men the traditional breadwinning role outside the house. Unemployment however forced them to remain at home, which placed intolerable strain on family members. The male still saw himself as provider, but was personally undermined when he could no longer fulfil this role. This could explain the otherwise paradoxical occasion when an unemployed man would forbid his wife to continue in work. Local people and men especially were seen as 'very held back', very 'hemmed within themselves'; they refused to move outwith their traditional role. Bound up with this complex of attitudes was low self esteem and an attitude of deference to people of higher status and education - often associated with the English. Women however seemed to be better equipped to deal with the dislocation of traditional roles brought about by high unemployment perhaps because, unlike men, they had always had a multiplicity of roles and were consequently more flexible in their attitudes.

Another worker, also having local roots, approached similar issues as follows:

Worker [This] is a funny area, demographically, geographically, everything. It's know periods of extreme high employment and it's known periods of extreme low employment. [...] I think people have got used to highs and lows. [...] And I think they're a bit more philosophical about unemployment than we maybe give them credit for. [...] I think there's a long history of self help, there's a long history of making do and surviving at really a very very basic level. I think this latest batch of unemployment's horrendous, and it's hellishly difficult if you're living through it because there are different expectations nowadays to what to what they maybe were when they had their last period of low. But in the main, [this area] survives because it's an active community. [...] In the main we have communities where there are still vestiges of extended

families. [...]

I think there's also ... a very active traditional voluntary sector - there's beer mat collectors' clubs and there's fuchsia societies and all these sorts of things that if you're low and really have a burning interest there's some place that you can be accommodated. [...]

There's always been people - determined unemployables, that sounds shocking - they would be called disadvantaged nowadays - but they were there and they were tolerated in all these villages. And there's an element of acceptance of odd behaviour. They're known as characters locally. But if they were in the town, they'd be institutionalised. I can remember when I was at school, the guy who was still coming along to the primary school when he was 42 and he sat in the back of the class and he was just big Alec. They locked him up with the polis man at night and he had a book that he wrote the names in and all these sorts of things. You remember these - no way any sort of 'oh, God, it was hellish', you know, just really with a lot of affection. People tolerated that sort of level, he was allowed to lead the parade on the gala day. Now I don't think that's completely broken down. I could stand up to be corrected, but I think there's still an element of that and of people just girding their loins and rolling up their sleeves and getting on wi' it.

A volunteer bureau worker drew a vivid contrast between life in his own rural community of origin and the modern urban environment. Where he came from, people didn't need social workers because by the time they had stood in the queue for their daily shopping, their problems had either been solved or forgotten. Similarly there was no need for formal foster care arrangements - children were just taken in, it just meant another handful of oatmeal in the mince. In his present social environment however, the worker sensed social and geographical isolation between ordinary working people and wealthy industrialists. He commented:

Worker I think [the town] has suffered over the past twenty years by the creation of so many of these peripheral schemes which were really satellites without a community. None of them have got a focus - they don't have a proper shopping centre, cinema or wherever you go to and so they have just become travelling stations. You go in and out from there for whatever you want to do. I think historically it appears that [the town] has been [one] of haves and have nots - very rich haves and very poor have nots - and that seems to have created a rather us and them attitude. I am saying this as an outsider and I may be totally wrong. I am maybe biased by the fact that I was brought up in a village where we weren't really aware of what went on outside and again this is the way the world has changed. We talk about the global village now and so our disaster and our life experiences and our happiness was shared amongst the village and we certainly didn't have it in the form of a soap opera we could switch on and off. So you were a part of everything that was going on and you felt

you had to respond in your own way if it was only making a pot of soup and going round to the person who had recently been bereaved.

For practitioners then, an awareness of the social and economic character of the local community was more than merely the common currency of daily life; it was a vital part of the practical understanding that informed their work. Only a small part of this understanding was directly attributable to a demonstrable command of such sociological, economic and demographical information as might be available; but there were no obvious instances of practitioners being seriously wrongly informed in this respect. A minority of practitioners showed some familiarity with the concepts, language and theory of relevant academic disciplines, such as economic and social planning, and anthropology. However, the sociology of the modern local community in Britain is a neglected field (Bulmer, 1986, 1987), and is little taught in the training courses taken by practitioners in this study. Practitioners relied upon their direct personal experience, supplemented by what they could pick up from the fragmentary knowledge which circulated in their professional environment.

8.4 Precepts for practice: specific expertise in various fields

This section focuses on practitioners' understandings of their own expertise specific to the type of project they were involved in. It does not comprise therefore, except incidentally, a description of the activities of the organisations; these have been summarised in the previous chapter. Here we shall be concerned with the practitioners' own rationale for the working practices they felt appropriate to their particular kind of work.

8.4.1 Role, tasks and skills of the volunteer organiser

The volunteer bureau workers in this study were able to give clear and precise accounts of the nature of their task and of various considerations relevant to its successful pursuit. Whereas some of the workers in the other organisations studied offered only rather vague generalised formulations of, for example, the role of councils of voluntary service, in the volunteering business concrete precepts were both circulated and put into practice.

The overwhelming majority of the volunteers at both bureaux were unemployed, although only one of the agencies overtly claimed a particular focus on unemployment. The organisers believed that volunteering brought definite benefits to the volunteer. One worker identified these as:

- relieves boredom and generates confidence; gives rise to a new self-evaluation of skills and needs; self-development; satisfaction
- raises social awareness
- opens the way to job opportunities, for some
- for ex-patients, it is therapeutic: 'something to keep their minds off themselves'.

This is illustrated in the following exchange:

CC ... What would you say ... are the benefits of volunteering to the volunteer?

Worker The benefits of volunteering - becoming more aware of others. I think you get a lot of satisfaction out of volunteering.

CC When you say becoming more aware of others, what does that mean?

Worker Going to mentally and physically handicapped people worse off than yourself because when you think you are talking to people who have been unemployed for a long time who are really feeling dejected and 'oh what's

the world done to me' and yet out there, there's people worse off than they are and surely we should be able to lift these people up and give something to them. And to me, what you put into a thing, you always get double back in return and some of my volunteers have come, as I say, for all different reasons unknown to me at the time but it's after the confidence is built up that they have then poured out their own personal real reasons for volunteering and we have found that being volunteers has helped them develop within themselves to be better people and to be more understanding towards society.

Another worker who dealt particularly with volunteers recovering from mental illness put his understanding of the benefits to the volunteers in this way:

Worker I think the benefits to the volunteer first are - they don't seem very grandiose and I wouldn't want them to be - I think they are there very largely to let them feel that they are a part of the community and accepted as an individual part of the community and to use that as a part of the growing process. How they use it, is up to them. I will support them if they want to do it but it may be that it is growing away from everyone's supporting is what they are wanting to do. [...] They get to know people in a way in which they can let little bits of vulnerability hang out without feeling depressed about it or bad about it and the recognition that other people have these vulnerabilities as well. [...] Over and above that the opportunity of making new acquaintances, of getting to know other people.

The understanding of the rewards of volunteering is linked to an appreciation of volunteers' needs and motivations, as the last quotation illustrates. Unemployed volunteers were seen by one worker as often needing a lot of support; sometimes they were severely lacking in confidence and pathetically unable to challenge officialdom even over trivial mistakes. Some volunteers with a mental illness come to hang on themselves the label they have been given by others, and use it as an excuse not to tackle their problems. Some who offer themselves are not really motivated to do voluntary work; presenting themselves may be a cry for help, or idle curiosity, or the result of having been sent along by a professional, or mere boredom. Volunteering can provide a medium to develop confidence and life and social skills. This process must be individualised, and can take months.

It emerged particularly clearly that the volunteer organisers tended to use an approach to interviewing closely approximating to the classic conception of client centred, non directive counselling. Indeed the process of interviewing a potential volunteer was seen as in some respects a counselling process, differentiated from therapy only by the need to keep to a more limited purpose and avoid taking on issues which the volunteer

bureau had neither the time nor the expertise to tackle. One organiser, a qualified social worker, said:

Worker ... I know that counselling, for instance, is not in the remit of the bureau and yet we find ourselves more and more doing, if you like, basic counselling.

CC ... What is this counselling that you ... do?

Worker Oh it can be anything! It could be, if you like, personal counselling. I mean you get to know the people who come in here and there are some of the volunteers who have more problems than others and you can sometimes find that you are in the position that they are coming in and they are really asking in some cases for advice. [...]

CC This would be on something nothing to do with volunteering?

Worker Nothing to do with volunteering. It could be on a personal level and you have got to get across to these people that you are not there to give them advice, all you can do in lots of cases is point out different solutions and what the likely implication of any one particular action is likely to be. And then say it is back to you. [...] Sometimes you have to sit and listen ten or fifteen minutes. [...] You know you don't have to say anything, they will say right, I think I have got that sorted out a wee bit, I know what I am wanting. [...]

CC You seem to be saying almost that counselling isn't really the job that you are here to do but that you can't help doing it.

Worker You can't help doing it. I don't think that you can separate interviewing and counselling often. Because you can be into an interview situation and you can talk to a person for half an hour and know very little about them - you are only getting what they give - but you can be five minutes into an interview situation and you think 'whew' ... how are you going to handle this. So I don't think you can separate interviewing from counselling.

Another worker, commenting on the lessons she had drawn from a counselling course, contrasted her approach before that experience:

CC Was there any kind of key idea from that course that you remember as being important to your job now?

Worker Being a good listener.

CC And do you think you had to learn that or do you think you were that already?

Worker I would have said I was a good listener but I would have been inclined to

butt in before the person got a chance to finish what they were saying. If someone was telling me their problem I would be itching to say 'oh, you stupid so and so, why did you not do this, why did you not do that' and I realise now that if somebody was talking out a problem with me, I let them speak it out and rather than me say 'why not try this, why not do that' I talk them round to the situation that they themselves are thinking of going to try out everything.

Similar views were expressed by a third worker:

Worker I think in the initial interview and getting to know them, it's letting them talk, listening to what's coming out. It is almost counselling with a small 'c' as they say in that try to get to the 'why are you here'. Yes, initially people think that they must present 'well I want to help, I want to do some good' but if you allow long enough for the person to talk about themselves, their interests, it begins to open up the needs that they are looking to fulfil through voluntary work and I think that is the better way of getting to know what they really want to do. What sometimes tends to happen is, like with the application for paid employment, you advertise a job and the applicant likes to match up to it so rather than say to someone in the Bureau 'here's a job for a helper in a creche' I think it is better to talk to them, what are they interested, what can they do. Sometimes it is difficult to see that not as an intrusion of privacy but as a way of getting to know about them and often I try to intersperse the interview and say 'the reason for asking you this is' and to try and get them to open up as to what they are looking for.

Despite the element of personal counselling that may enter into the interview process however, many cases are more straightforward. One agency used suitably selected and trained volunteers to conduct the interviewing of future volunteers, and in order to do so offered semi-standardised procedures and written guidelines. One worker disclaimed any particular formula for interviewing, saying 'it goes from what I see coming in the front of me'. She went on however to describe quite explicitly the following six-stage process:

- make the person comfortable, offer coffee
- explain about the bureau and volunteering
- enquire about interests and motivations
- give out literature
- allow time for reflection: placements are not offered immediately
- on the volunteer's return and expression of interest, they are directed towards an appropriate agency.

Volunteer organisers were agreed about the need for careful matching of the volunteer

to the job, and about the importance of the volunteer having a free choice not subject to any subtle coercion. As one explained it:

Worker It is so important in voluntary work to get across that this is your choice, you are volunteering, particularly when the person is referred by psychiatric day care services or social worker or GP because they see you as an extension of that and so their role here is to satisfy you who will report favourably back to the principal psychiatrist and we want to encourage the idea that you are here of your own free will, free choice, you are giving to us what you have got to give and that's maybe why sometimes we go a little bit over the top in stressing that 'you are in the driving seat, you choose'.

The kind of work seen as suitable for a volunteer was of course related to the organiser's perceptions of their needs and motivations. A worker described the signs which might signal the person recovering from mental illness:

Worker The presentation at first interview is of the person who patently and physically displays their own perception of unacceptance - head bowed, talks to their knees or their feet, quite unable to appreciate any humour although sometimes themselves very humorous but not able to see their own humour. The body language signals of severe stress, very largely there, I think are the first things that warn me we have got someone who has got difficulties, and I don't want to put it in any other sense at that point in time.

The same worker identified suitable places for such volunteers in the following terms:

CC When you look around for potential places to put volunteers, what are you looking for essentially?

Worker Acceptance, humour, non-judgemental more than anything else and flexibility and the ability to move with the person. I think these are the overall bits. I try to do it a lot on the basis of an individual place for an individual volunteer and sometimes it almost manufacturing wee bits of jobbies that they can do. And then the warmth, a little bit of ability to see the small thing as being something worth while - to be able to say thank you for that. Because I think that is one of the terribly important things that people in [mental] hospital suffer from. They spend the whole time having to feel thank you if not say it to nurses, doctors, everyone concerned and they need someone quite quickly after that to say thank you back to them.

The matching process is conducted as follows:

Worker The process of matching is one in which we try to say to an organisation, 'here is someone with the interests and the energy to do something positive for you, will you talk to them about it' and the volunteer the same thing so that they go along and it is a job between a volunteer and

an organisation not between us as an organisation with a volunteer in between.

And the process of effecting the introduction:

CC How do you think to yourself 'this is going to be a good match of volunteer in the situation'?

Worker I try to get the volunteer (a) to see the place and preferably then if I can, the people or one of the people who is going to work with the volunteer to meet the volunteer away from that place as well so that they get to know one another slightly and I can then measure what's going on between them.

CC You would go with them when this is happening?

Worker Yes I would. I would go up to the place of work with them and I would then probably have the next session in here [the bureau] where we could sit and talk together and look at things and talk about the difficulties that are likely to crop up as well and I would then be measuring it.

Support for the volunteer after placement was also considered most important, although naturally the need for it and the extent of it varied greatly between volunteers. At one extreme is the competent and self-sufficient volunteer who requires little from the bureau beyond the initial introduction. At the other is the volunteer whose many personal problems interfere with his capacity for voluntary work as much as any other aspect of his life. Regarding the latter in particular, the practitioners felt it was most important that they should feel free to come and share their concerns at any time; as one put it, 'my door is open'.

In both agencies practical work such as gardening, house maintenance and repair, office work or simple escort duties was seen as having a special relevance for volunteers whose own skills, strength or resources were low. After doing this sort of work for a time, a volunteer might increase in confidence and ambition and move on to work more centred on people and relationships. However, a definite commitment is expected even in these cases. One worker required volunteers to commit themselves on a regular weekly basis for a minimum of two months. Another described her policy as follows:

CC You don't encourage people to hang about but yet you do sometimes encourage them to work here on the premises [on simple practical tasks]. What's the difference between those two things?

Worker A lot of difference. If a volunteer is coming in here and working, they are actually doing something. It could be that the individual volunteer is very much lacking in self confidence. Now if I had to put a volunteer

like that out into a community centre working for another organisation, I could almost bet you that they wouldn't get the level of support that is needed whereas here, it's easy to break off whichever - if it's a [colleague] or myself if we are doing something, we make a point of every so often going through and saying to the volunteer, 'right, how are you getting on, what are you doing' and it is this, if you like, wee bit of individual attention that builds up their confidence and they start to think, 'yes, I can do this'. Now there is a big difference between doing that and letting a group come in and sit round a coffee table doing nothing but drink coffee and chat to each other. OK it is nice and cosy but you are not getting an end result.

Volunteers whose own needs were considerable posed another problem for organisers if it seemed that more effort was going to have to be put in to support them than their potential contribution warranted. At least one organiser explicitly adopted the principle that what the volunteer had to offer should outweigh the effort put in to meeting their needs, although plainly this is a difficult calculation to make in practice. Aside from the problem of meeting individual volunteers' needs, organisers also had to bear in mind the image they would create of the bureau if too high a proportion of its volunteers were 'borderline' cases; if a situation were allowed to develop whereby other agencies came to believe that volunteers from the bureau were usually needy and vulnerable people without great strengths to offer, this would obviously have a detrimental effect on the whole volunteering 'market'.

Finally in this sketch of volunteer organisers' working principles, it is worth mentioning that they usually held clear ideas about what did and did not constitute suitable voluntary work. Operating in an environment of high unemployment and with volunteers who were predominantly unemployed, this is obviously a central issue. One organiser's report stipulated that the practical work referred to above and arranged by his own agency should not compete with paid employment; that it should provide a service to the community; and that it should provide training to the volunteer. Of these it is perhaps the first which is the most problematic. In practice it seemed to mean that work which might conceivably be done either on a commercial basis or by the public services was judged in a given instance to be unlikely to be done this way because the recipient lacked the money to pay for it, or the public services lacked the resources. This worker believed that voluntary work should be complementary and not supplementary to paid services; it should not compete with or undermine the position of paid workers; and it should therefore not entail conflict with the unions.

8.4.2 Voluntary organisations and the role of the council for voluntary service

The two councils of voluntary service covered in the field studies differed in their histories, activities, resources and organisation, and yet the three identified practitioners struggled with similar issues to do with the proper role of the c.v.s. Whereas the volunteer organisers usually showed a concrete and practical understanding of their task, the c.v.s. workers were often preoccupied with a tension between an idealisation of their role and what they perceived as its real daily exigencies. The idealisation is the concept of the generalist local intermediary body formulated in the Wolfenden (1978) report and reviewed earlier in Chapter 4. This stresses development and liaison functions for the local voluntary sector. The daily realities however often seemed to focus on responsibility for direct service delivery.

A worker held the view that the c.v.s. should not take on substantial responsibilities as an employer; that its main job was the support and development of emerging voluntary initiatives. The organisation had in fact a creditable record in setting up or acting as midwife to new voluntary groups of various kinds. The worker was content to act as a 'first stop' for voluntary organisations - the 'ever open door'. In practice however this meant a very high level of continuing demand for information, advice, and friendly support, and a vague distinction between genuine development work and simply helping existing organisations to keep going. This is summarised in the following discussion:

Worker I think it's part of any council of social service's job to stop voluntary organisations going to the wall. What we've got here is a plethora of new voluntary organisations that've almost set up because they've had to. Because the way the funding's gone is to voluntary organisations, voluntary managers, ti-da, ti-da, ti-da, and they've had to set up to take the opportunity. [...] So they're there for a different reason, they're there with a different aim, and in the main their problems are very different to the traditional voluntary organisation. There's bits where they cross over, but their needs are different.

CC And what's your role in relation to those do you think?

Worker Well, it's difficult. I think we've ended up, whether by accident or design, managing these types of organisation, which I don't think necessarily is the role of a council of social service. We've almost got sucked into the thinking that you should grab things.

CC Is that because they don't have the expertise, the experience to do it for themselves, is that what you mean?

Worker No, I think it's because - can I be really cynical? - I think it's because

we've wanted to do this, and to do it we've had to set up an organisation to get the resources, and it comes back to grabbing. It's got something to do with the developmental role, and seeing a need, seeing a gap in the market and wanting to plug it, and seeing that as the easy way to do it.

CC Is that not part of the role?

Worker Cynical. Yes, but I think that the reality for that is that's left us too clogged up with a management role to really take on a real developmental role.

Much of the worker's effort was devoted therefore to maintaining by indirect and sometimes direct means existing voluntary social service activities, so that although the c.v.s. was not a major employer, it nevertheless was heavily committed to the maintenance of service provision.

Another worker displayed long familiarity and a full and sophisticated understanding of the Wolfenden concept, and regularly spelt it out quite explicitly. The same ideas were expressed in the organisation's literature and reports. In reality however, much of the activity pursued seemed to be difficult to reconcile with the Wolfenden principles. This was apparent in several areas. It may well be that this difficulty reflects problems and inconsistencies in the Wolfenden formulation (cf. Leat, Smolka and Unell, 1981) as much as any lack of skill or competence on the part of the practitioners.

The development role of a c.v.s. is seen as helping to get new projects started, moving them towards self-sufficiency and independence, and then withdrawing:

Worker The general policy is that where we get projects going is that we get them up and running and then move them out and they become independent.

In practice however it was often difficult to decide when to withdraw. Once the worker had established his contribution to the organisation, the adverse consequences of withdrawal might be only too easy to anticipate:

CC It is obviously a traditional thing that you say in community work 'we're going to work ourselves out of a job', that type of statement. Do you subscribe to that?

Worker Well yes if only because I believe it never works out that way. [...] Yes I think we should be - particularly at local neighbourhood level - working oneself out of a job and let others take over that you are not needed. To that extent ... we articulate that policy and we attempt to adhere to it although we are not entirely consistent. I mean my experience is that there is always something else turns up.

CC Sure. Provided it is something else and not just more of the same presumably?

Worker Well that's a good point and I suppose I have to admit that the other side is a lot of what I have been saying always sounds as though we had a really active consistent policy over the years. A lot of what we have done has been purely reactive.

The development role shades imperceptibly into the maintenance role:

Worker So with the general policy behind my or any other member of [the c.v.s.'s] staff becoming involved in a voluntary organisation committee should be that that committee at that point would benefit from an input from [the c.v.s.] to help it through a difficult patch or give it perspective it was lacking whatever and, after a year or two, then we withdraw.

On occasion this could mean helping an established organisation that had run into difficulties such as atrophy, goal shift, or conflict between staff and committee. From this and the previous example it can readily be appreciated therefore that the initial development and subsequent maintenance of voluntary organisations are activities not easily distinguishable in practice; but as the Wolfenden model is seen as giving emphasis to development, workers may be left with a sense of incongruity between their supposed aims and what they find themselves actually doing.

A similar tension was apparent in considering how and when the c.v.s. should give formal independence to activities which had originally been started and run in-house. In one case a worker had retained considerable direct control of a very large programme of activities run under the MSC's Community Programme when in all probability it would have released c.v.s. staff time and made for more purposeful planning had this programme been floated off as the professed model required. A common observation about this kind of situation was that the tail (the project) might be, or was, wagging the dog (the c.v.s.). The decision about how and when to move a project to independence is seldom simple; it involves among other things weighing the project's chances of independent success against the possibility that much would be lost when the experience and expertise of the initiating workers is no longer fully available. On the other hand, it was clear too that c.v.s. workers found it advantageous to themselves to maintain a working relationship beyond the time when it was really necessary to the success of a project; by this means they gained knowledge and influence both over that sphere of work and more widely. Since an intermediary body trades in little else, maintaining contact especially with a successful project strengthened the credibility of the c.v.s. worker.

Workers in the councils for voluntary service also experienced a tension between the development aims, and the function of maintaining a general forum for voluntary organisations and on occasion representing these interests to government. In principle a c.v.s. comprises a membership of voluntary organisations, who pay a fairly nominal sum to join. One c.v.s. worker acutely pointed out that there seemed to be little benefit for a voluntary organisation to join formally, since in practice organisations received the same kind of support whether they were in membership or not. The worker had also discovered that most of the voluntary bodies listed in the c.v.s. directory were local branches of national organisations, for whom the national affiliation would probably be far more useful than a link to a local c.v.s. I discussed the matter with this worker's colleague:

CC If I were a small voluntary organisation, why should I part with my £10 or something to join [the c.v.s.]?

Worker That's what we have been exercising in a sense. There are a number of levels to it I mean there's the sort of more superficial, there are some services we have like photocopying, typing, information, for which there's a discount; publications for members and the newsletter which is a sort of organ of communication. There are slightly less tangible benefits we would hope in terms of if there are issues coming up, then [the c.v.s.] has more clout if you like and can make representations rather than small individual organisations and I am just trying to think where that could be said to have happened recently. [...] We have got voluntary organisations together to meet us on regular, twice yearly intervals, with the Region on sort of general issues of better liaison, communication, services, things like that. Again an individual organisation couldn't do that. One of the first things I got involved in was the pursuing the issues that had come out of the Wolfenden report, locally, and that's how these meetings with the Region got started in the first place. I was also very careful not to be seen, or trying to make the point frequently that [the c.v.s.] did not represent voluntary organisations. We could speak for some, some of the time but generally, if there was to be comments from voluntary organisations the method was that we would invite those interested organisations to meet and from that meeting you would get some sort of statement of position.

CC This is a rather subtle distinction perhaps for somebody outside the voluntary sector to comprehend, isn't it?

Worker That's right, that's always the problem.

CC We are representing the voluntary sector but we aren't actually.

Worker Well that's right.

This worker therefore was keen to retain the traditional 'liaison' function, but quickly offered and substantiated the opinion that the c.v.s in question had had little success in this respect. There is then a twofold problem here. The coordination and liaison function enshrined in the c.v.s. ideology was found by workers to be difficult to carry out credibly; and further, to do so required quite a different perspective and sense of priorities from the development function which the workers also espoused. On top of this, both these functions were liable to be usurped by the time seen to be necessary to service or manage ongoing service delivery activities.

8.4.3 Principles of community enterprise

Several of the identified practitioners demonstrated considerable knowledge of the aims and ideology of community business, coupled with variable degrees of expertise in translating this into practical action. Since there exists in Scotland a relatively well developed support and information network on community enterprise, and a relatively high density of projects, the practitioners had opportunities to acquaint themselves with current debates by means such as conferences, literature and personal contact. They showed an awareness of the issues and problems and were able to relate them to their own situation.

One such current issue concerns whether community businesses should be subject to the same criteria of viability and profit as ordinary businesses. A worker identified three positions on this as having emerged at a recent convention. The first view stressed the importance of profitability. The second, contrariwise, denied the relevance of profitability as a criterion for the success of community business. The third, intermediate, position was that of 'viability', i.e. solvency: that an enterprise should 'wash its face'. This worker identified himself with the third position.

A worker demonstrated a clear position on the fundamental aims of community enterprise:

Worker Community enterprise and community business to me are the same thing but I know to other people that community business is basically very much a profit orientated business [Rather, the main aim is] the idea of self development of people and providing jobs or social services. [...] The classic phrase they use is business is business is business: I disagree with that! I just do fundamentally disagree with that.

CC You have spoken of objectives like the creation of wealth, the creation of employment and quality of life as all being possible aspects. ... I would assume that you regard all of these as important and that's what you mean by community enterprise.

Worker Yes, that's right, aye. The main thing to me is if we look at how people gauge success or failure of a business it's really a profit and loss and at the bottom you have figures and at the bottom figure it is either a bad one or a good one depending on what colour ink you are using. How can you seriously put, interpret into figures, the fact that a group of people have actually got themselves together, have traded in something, gone through all the problems and their confidence from being basically people who can't get jobs and have very little prospect of getting jobs, they have actually brought their own self esteem up so that they have created their own job.

This worker held the view that a measure of public subsidy for community enterprise was appropriate because of the wider benefits accruing to the community in general and because, unlike private enterprise, profits would be applied to the general good and not directors or shareholders. Community business had a distinctive role in comparison to the private sector:

Worker It is important for the community business movement to let private enterprise understand that it is a complementary partner and it is of benefit to private enterprises. [...] Somebody said to me, ... he explained community business, community enterprise to private entrepreneurs that it is setting up a business in the wrong area, with the wrong people and he said that kind of made them understand what it was about.

CC Where a conventional business wouldn't succeed.

The worker quoted with approval the development model espoused by another organisation, which comprised the following five stages: 'pure animation' (the process of engendering interest); formation of a steering group and drawing up a constitution; providing ongoing support and specialised training; providing expert financial and legal advice; and negotiation with politicians. He also referred with approval to the training model used by yet another development organisation, in particular the value to local people of meeting others involved in different local projects. He believed that the development process with local groups is necessarily a very slow one as local people need a lot of support. The process of setting up a community business from initial animation to final viability might take ten years.

The notions of animation or training figured largely in the perceptions of all the

workers concerned with fostering community enterprise or enhancing local people's capacities for gainful employment. One held clear views about the respective functions of training organisations and of industry, believing that the former should tackle basic skills such as the use of computers or developing appropriate attitudes for a service industry whereas the latter should tackle higher level and more specialised training.

A worker emphasised how important it was to 'market' training packages in an outgoing way; that it was vital to create packages which would be attractive to unemployed people. A colleague described how they sought to draw in local unemployed people and avoid an unflattering image:

Worker What we were looking for at that time was how we could give it a better flavour than 'come to [the organisation's] group counselling session'. [...]

CC Group counselling was felt to be too much emphasising the negatives or something like that?

Worker Well very social worky I suppose in a sense. For some people it might be a bit dry. [...] We wanted to establish for ourselves some kind of identity. We were having to address the problem of getting the message to people and the first part of the message was that we existed and to try and explain who we were. We just didn't have any street credibility at all.

A worker considered that there were three areas of training which needed to be addressed in preparing local people to set up a community business, comprising general business skills; skills in the development and evaluation of possible ideas for an enterprise; and confidence development and communication skills. Of these, the latter had to be tackled first. Workers within the organisation often spoke of the need for 'front loading' of training programmes designed for unemployed people, by which was meant the need for a particular emphasis on very basic communication and life skills seen as necessary precursors to more specifically job-related training. However, it was vital in one worker's view that a person's decision to participate in training should be freely made:

Worker There are some people who can be more quickly helped to find their particular sense of direction. I think basically it comes back to being able to make the choices - but to be enabled to make the choices that suit them. So for some folk it's if you can help them establish some of the things they want to do, put them in touch with some of the kinds of training that might help them in the future. [...] To be available whenever, people can come back after a couple of years doing something else or making a decision. When people say, I don't want to be here, then you say, fine, that's good you can make that choice, come back when you are ready. If you can support that decision rather than say, well if you

don't want to be here, well sod off, and make it a negative thing. If you make it a positive statement, it encourages people at a later stage to come back.

A worker entertained a variety of notions about the forms of development work which his own agency might undertake. These included providing sheltered or starter accommodation for beginning small conventional businesses, or longer term small business accommodation, or both; providing a business development arm for a federation of local community organisations; providing centralised support, consultancy and management functions for new small conventional or community businesses; and acting as a base for MSC temporary work schemes. Unfortunately the worker was confused about the merits and potential of these various ideas in the particular local situation. He was not able to define the various possible goals in a consistent, realistic and accessible way, and this seemed to fuel an interminable and inconclusive debate about aims and methods of working. Confusion in the expressed overall purposes was added to by the fact that proposals for specific schemes were poorly researched and inadequately prepared. This meant that project associates were not able to grasp the purposes by reference to a convincing example any more than by reference to a considerable volume of rather empty general claims.

Besides a general appreciation of the philosophy and practice of community enterprise, practitioners in this area require a practical command of business skills such as financial planning and market research. They also need themselves to possess, or be able to call on in others, specialised knowledge relating to the particular productive enterprise they plan to engage in, such as craft or textile production. One practitioner had given a fair amount of time to developing his own skill and knowledge in the rather abstruse expertise of a planned project, so that it could be worked out in detail. At the same time he recognised, and would have wished to make good, a lack of his own skill in marketing. What all this points to therefore is the range of knowledge and skill necessary for success in this field. Given the slender internal and external resources and very limited experience of the practitioners identified in this study, it is perhaps not surprising that none had achieved anything approaching mastery in the field of community enterprise.

8.4.4 Role of the unemployed workers' centre

Of the four types of organisation covered in the field studies, the unemployed workers' centres seemed to have the least clearly defined and well differentiated mandate; and this was not unexpected in the light of the survey findings and the literature. The practitioners in the unemployed workers' centres wished to embrace a wide range of service and campaign objectives and activities with a wide cross section of the community, by no means restricted to those officially defined as unemployed. Indeed it was a theme of debate as to whether such centres should include the word 'unemployed' in their title; in practice they catered for, and welcomed, such groups as women ineligible to claim benefit, the early retired, and those with a disability as well as the officially unemployed. Some people felt that the term 'unemployed' carried a stigma which could discourage potential users, while others felt it was important to assert the specific source of the problems unemployment brings. The workers recognised the close affinity between some of their actual or intended activities and the potential programmes of the statutory community education and social work services and certain voluntary organisations. They defended their involvement in such areas as community education work and welfare rights by pointing out that the existing local services in actuality under-served unemployed people, while accepting that in principle there might seem to be similarities of aim. One worker said:

Worker We are directing things specifically towards one section of the community, a section of the community which often feels itself stigmatised and apart from other sections.

A worker wished her centre to have an attractive, welcoming aspect to the whole community. She had found on taking up her job that the centre was frequented by a small coterie; she quoted an authoritative local source who had described the centre before her arrival as 'only a howf' (a disreputable haunt, in this case of people suspected of fiddling the benefits system). The worker had therefore set out to 'raise the tone of the place'. It was important to be personally available to people who drop in. In running the centre she regarded it as vital to be 'always reaching out' to the community beyond the four walls; one of her first jobs had been to get on the local 'subway line' (network) through cultivating personal contacts. It was important to make it easy and enjoyable for people to come through the door. Moreover unemployment was not merely about lacking paid work, but rather it was a question of 'having something productive to do with your life'. For these reasons therefore, the programme of a centre might include a whole range of social, educational, and cultural

activities; it should not merely be providing welfare benefits advice. Besides its own direct services and activities, a centre should offer advice and counselling on career related and other matters.

A worker defined the twofold function of his centre as comprising a direct service to people who used the premises combined with an information and campaigning role in relation to the interests of unemployed people generally:

Worker There is two different functions. There is a centre here which gives advice and has a facility for people to use. It is obvious a centre of this physical size cannot serve 25,000 people within [the local area], it is a physical impossibility, therefore we have got to argue for the unemployed within this [area] and every forum we can find and put forward their points of view. Therefore it is important for us to be involved in organisations because people tend to forget about the unemployed because the unemployed are not visible - the people don't walk around with placard saying 'I am unemployed'.

The first function was to help people individually:

Worker That is meeting their individual needs as individuals and they get confidence from coming in here and some training from the groups they participate in and go on to get jobs elsewhere It isn't creating any more jobs out there but it is helping them as individuals.

Other forms of individual help would be advice work and the possibility of benefitting from general concessions for unemployed people achieved by campaigning work of the centre.

The target group in the second aspect of the work was not the unemployed themselves but rather the public as a whole:

Worker That is directed to the opinion and decision makers within local economy and the Scottish economy and that is to keep the problems of the unemployed directly in focus in front of their minds if you like and that is one of most important roles of the centre is to keep nagging away at people about unemployment, the problems and we want some solution because it is unacceptable to society.

One worker expressed a definite complementarity between the more welfare oriented service activities and the more political goals. Welfare rights work was seen as the 'bread and butter' but also functioned as a 'marketing arm': 'it is one of the ways we get people into the centre'. Similarly a scheme whereby unemployed people were enabled to claim concessions from local traders was justified as follows:

Worker It has got at least two aspects to it. One is trying to get something for unemployed people who are living on meagre resources. The other aspect is a marketing one. We have increased our membership about threefold since we started operating the concessions scheme. It is another magnet to pull people into the centre. They come in here, they get their card and they say 'well what else do you do here'.

CC Do you also see it as a way of increasing public awareness of the problems of the unemployed?

Worker Yes very much so. Unemployment isn't something for the politicians to talk about about once every four years or however often the election may be. It is important that the butcher sees that he is adjacent to unemployed people.

[...]

CC If you had to pick on one of these aspects, which would you think was the most important?

Worker I would rather not. I think the benefits to unemployed people.

CC The direct cash?

Worker The direct cash benefits. If I was an unemployed person that is the one I would use.

CC That's the one you would want, right, but perhaps in your slightly more political position, you might also think that the publicity - public awareness was in some ways more important?

Worker Yes because I think it is important to realise that unemployment is not a yoke that will be cast off by the unemployed themselves. It needs the joint action of the whole of the community, politicians, churches, trades unions, street traders, the butcher, the baker, until everyone becomes more aware of what unemployment is and how big a scourge it is on the society, how big a waste it is, nothing is going to be done about it.

The practitioners' accounts show, then, a fair amount of uncertainty and debate about exactly what unemployed workers' centres can do or should be doing. This is perfectly intelligible in the context of the history of such centres and of the ideologies battling for control of the movement. Unemployed workers' centres are a new, and still experimental, response to a complicated problem, are informed by widely differing interests, and are insecurely resourced by bodies with different purposes from those of centre workers. There is no authoritative literature and little previous experience to provide a guide. Taken severally, many of the activities seem at least moderately

feasible and at least arguably relevant to individuals' problems and public issues surrounding unemployment. Taken as a whole however, it is difficult to discern philosophies of action which are both coherent and widely shared. When one adds together all the claims and pursuits, one is led to the conclusion that what tends to inform this field is a complex of large, not to say grandiose, social visions and political ambitions baffled by the realities of dealing with relatively small numbers of individual cases for which, at best, only modest palliatives can be offered. In such an environment, doubt and confusion are only to be expected.

8.5 Personal attributes and values

8.5.1 The significance of personal qualities

It can hardly be doubted that the practitioner's personal history, character, attitudes and values enter at least as importantly into considerations of his or her approach to work as do the more cerebral matters of knowledge and theory. The question of personality or character is always pertinent in the recruitment of staff and the selection of trainees. In social work and community education the personal factors have traditionally been given great weight, arguably to the neglect of the mastery of relevant knowledge.

The practitioners in this study were in no doubt that their personal histories had affected both their choice of job and their way of doing it. They were easily and with minimal prompting able to specify some of the ways this had come about, and often explained their way of understanding or going about something in terms of what they knew from their life experience. Indeed, it was sometimes difficult to resist the impression that a practitioner's life experience and personality were by far the most important factors in the conduct of their practice, and certainly dominant over specialised formal knowledge and skills. Often therefore, there was no difficulty in tracing a relationship between clearly evident personal factors and the conduct of practice. On the other hand, in several cases the picture was more complicated. This was where it seemed that aspects of the individual's life history, personality and personal circumstances were affecting their behaviour in ways they themselves did not wholly appreciate, or partly denied, or preferred not to disclose intentionally. Evidence for such a state of affairs arose where the practitioner's actions, known either from their own account or from independent sources, were inconsistent with their professed priorities and beliefs; or where their behaviour and attitudes to situations at work seemed better explicable by reference to personal preoccupations and values than to a detached appraisal of opportunities and constraints alone.

8.5.2 Helping people and the value of persons

Several practitioners expressed very clearly the personal impulse to care and the ethic of respect for persons.

CC Where did you learn all these things Sue that you have brought to your

job?

Sue (Pause) I suppose being a volunteer for a long time myself.

CC Was this before [previous job] even?

Sue Och aye. I think the way I was brought up by my parents. I was brought up to go to church and always had it instilled in me 'it is always nice to help people less fortunate than yourself', always been totally involved through the guides, youth clubs, etc. etc. and just gave them my best from there. I would have said [previous jobs] because there I had to talk to social workers, I had to write reports, confidentiality was very important because I was dealing with the parents of the children that were coming into care so I had to be very careful of how I conducted situations there. I would have said working with [previous job] as well who were very strict in one, and your deportment and how you spoke to people, how you met people and how you conducted your day to day life. That was things that they were always on about and I think that was it. A lot of it is pure common sense.

A worker who had much experience with young and adult offenders regretted that his present job did not include this:

Worker I think maybe part of the thing I miss is I enjoy working with the so-called 'baddies' of society and I haven't really seen any of them really - a couple of young rascals but that's all.

He referred back to his days in residential child care:

Worker I started to work in a List D school which was a block school at the time and I went in to run a unit that was going to individualise children who were going to be seen to likely stay for longer. I was warned off by everyone in the staff, from the boss right down, that you must not let these boys go out on their own, they won't come back and that you must punish. Now I decided that I can't punish them because the belting that I would give them was nothing like the hammering they had from their dads, mums, next door neighbours and what have you, it just doesn't damn well work. So a waste of my energy and everything else. In it, and we started by the grain of sand bit which was difficult saying to staff, 'find a good thing in a boy, once you have found a good, you emphasise that and the next good thing that comes along, you emphasise that as well as the first point' and eventually you persuade them that being good is worth while.

Another worker expressed dismay at the treatment of children in a residential unit, which she had experienced in a previous job:

Worker Now most of them, they weren't there because of criminal acts, they were emotionally disturbed most of these lads and I found that quite disturbing

in itself when I went there. I couldn't see why they would take these kids and they put them in this big building, this home and the only privacy they have is when they go to the loo. Every hour of the day there was somebody either watching them or looking at them, they weren't out of sight of anybody, I found this a wee bit disturbing. I found it very demanding. I do get on quite well with youngsters. I can talk to them. I mean I can talk to anybody but I do get on quite well with kids. Probably the reason for that, I can remember myself when I was younger, I hated anybody patronising me, I hated anybody talking down to me. When I talk to kids I try and avoid that. I try and, if you like, treat them as equals.

A worker recognised that she spent more of her time than was perhaps appropriate on basic direct helping tasks:

CC ... I've been impressed by how much of your simple time and energy goes on what are really quite straightforward functions, the transport, the fundraising, the printing, this sort of thing. Do you think your time is appropriately used in that -

Worker Nah. I do that, that's me, that's the bit o' me.

CC Why do you do it if it's -

Worker Well, I've got an awful funny philosophy. I wouldnae ask anybody to do what I wasnae prepared to do myself. And I think maybe - this sounds very moralistic, and it's no' meant to be, but I see myself as a public servant, and I think that you cannae say that you're there to service organisations if you're not prepared to do it. Now until very recently there's only been [colleague] and I and we've had to bounce between doing quite - I don't think they're menial tasks, I think that they're all helping people tasks, and I suppose it's just the level of the spectrum you're prepared to operate to. It's my response to it rather than somebody else's in another council of social service and I have no doubt whatsoever that somebody else coming in would say no, I'm no' into storing jumble in my garage, or whatever. For me it's important 'cos that's my way of saying even these menial tasks that are important to you as an organisation I take on board that they are important. And I think that sometimes if that is all the service that a voluntary organisation wants from you, it's easy enough to supply it! But that's me.

CC Could it be said that your time might be better used if you did less of these things which you could in fact ask a volunteer to do, for example -

Worker Yes, well I'm sure it could. I don't know that I would get as much job satisfaction from it. So a lot of it's my personal emolument, if you like. [...] You'd have to ask the voluntary organisations that come whether they would rather I was at a social policy conference or was along cleaning the thrift shop.

A worker in an unemployed workers' centre expressed his appreciation of the plight of the unemployed person:

Worker So we deliberately tried to collate a whole series of interviews with people as to their views of unemployment and the Centre were, it was quite startling.

CC Was it - in what way?

Worker The genuine humanness of the problem coming through. A lot of people tend to think of unemployment as being 16% or 17,000 or a whole community or these sort of glib phrases. When we started interviewing people and really got behind the facade of unemployment as an issue, we had interviewers and interviewees virtually in tears on quite a number of occasions talking about it. I mean there was one guy who was made redundant from the [local industry] - it must be nearly eight years ago, something like that, and he has not worked since and may well never work again - he was talking about the loss of comradeship, the lack of money and the pressures at home, the pressures on himself, his lack of self esteem, that fact that he had been unemployed longer than a lot of other people who were in the Centre now and was beginning to be disregarded as 'oh him, he is unemployable, I wouldnae have employed him', so the divisions that start growing up amongst our depressed community was quite sad because a lot of us were saying, 'wait a minute, how the hell do you ever do anything for that person'.

8.5.3 Life crises

In several cases the practitioners traced their involvement with their present work to the changes following some kind of life event, such as illness or unemployment. This experience was significant not merely because it was part of the chain of circumstances which had led to the present job, but also because it deeply affected the meaning the practitioner attached to the job. The experience lent a new dimension to the practitioner's understanding of situations which might face the people she currently worked with; and it modified basic personal priorities and values.

A worker who had spent several years as a political agent said:

Worker It is a full-time job, a very full-time job - six days a week for fourteen hours a day and, after some nine years of it, I caught hepatitis - I gave blood and they used a dirty needle and I was in bed for nine months and I think during that period I began to recognise that what you are doing in

politics is perhaps useful but that you never get at the individual problems of people and that this skirting over the surface wasn't giving me the sort of satisfaction I liked.

[...]

CC In a sense it was your illness that changed your direction.

Worker I think it gave me the time to stop. I think that is one of the problems of social work as well that you are so much at it for so much of the day so many days of the week, that you don't stop and look at yourself and say 'am I really doing the right thing, is this the thing I should be doing now or have I changed enough doing it and want to move on'.

For another worker, illness had itself led to unemployment and a complete change of career direction:

CC Am I right that you left industry because you had a back injury at that time and you had to stop work to recover from that and that it was when you were back in work that you came into this job?

Worker I came initially as a volunteer. One of the problems I was finding going back into industry and possibly it was because of everyone having to be completely productive [under modern social and market conditions] was - . I found on interview, employers couldn't see beyond the possibility of the future back injury and me having time off on the sick. Now my employment record didn't show that I had any time off through back injury because it was one of those things that I had managed to keep going through but they couldn't see beyond that. After a year of, first of all, being out of things through illness and then finding it very difficult to get a positive interview, I had got to the point of the traditional 'is it worth getting up in the morning' I had no longer got what it takes to secure a job and I decided at that point now was the time to do something about it so I came to ... offer my services as a volunteer.

[...]

CC As far as you are concerned, personally, the experience of having been a volunteer is very important to your eventually coming to take this job.

Worker Yes the one thing it did it helped me to see more of what was going on in the voluntary sector. I came in quite fixed in my mind that I could do hospital visiting, and in particular psychiatric hospitals, because I knew of the need there and patients never had a visitor and it was only when I came in that I realised how many things one could do and the whole variety that could be relevant to working experience. The thing that interested me most was the fact that I could work as a volunteer, interviewing people, helping them to find what they wanted to do which seemed to be more in line with the industrial management skills that I had

used before.

One worker had progressed through a variety of manual and clerical jobs in industry and had eventually become involved in trade union work and other socially-oriented activities including voluntary youth work. She then attended a course for part-time youth leaders:

Worker It opened up a whole new world for me; I thought this is what I really want to do and I started making enquiries into finding out how I could go about becoming more involved. Didn't even think about it then as a career - I didn't think this was a job I wanted to do, but something I want to do with my life. I didn't think at that time, but I mean I was quite comfortable with my salary, you know, just sitting with my switchboard. But then in 1981 my hip-bone cracked completely, and I was laid up for about four or five months. While I was laid up, waiting to go into hospital for an operation, I got word that the factory was going to close down in March. So that just made up my mind for me. It was all or nothing - I've got to get my leg straightened out, going to apply for the college, and I'll have my redundancy money to fall back on, a wee bit. And I was lucky - I came out the hospital just in time to get my interview at [college]. Had the operation in the April and started at [college] in September.

Unemployment was also a turning point in the career of a well qualified younger worker who had taken an extended holiday and then found the way back into work much harder than anticipated, thus forcing a change of direction:

Worker I had felt that it being my first job, I was becoming somewhat disillusioned and frustrated at the speed, and way things were going I wasn't particularly happy so I decided that I hadn't actually done anything at all apart from go to university and get a job and I didn't quite like that idea so left to cycle! We went down - cycled Europe and North Africa ... in retrospect probably exceedingly bad timing according to the economic climate but really it was a thing that you can't really quantify the experience that you gain in doing something like that. [...] So we came back here and then that's when a few problems arose in terms of getting back in. Interestingly enough, people felt that it was a super idea to do such a thing and probably wish they had done that but when you apply for jobs it doesn't particularly go well, unfortunately, and I may say that from experience of my own self and experiences of my two friends. They both - well all of us actually feel we are still in some way or other suffering for it.

CC You have lost your place on the ladder in a sense.

Worker Yes in a way. I'm not too upset about it but I felt that, certainly when we came back, it was just dreadful. I mean no way would anyone entertain it - not a chance.

CC You mean there were jobs you could apply for but you didn't get very far.

Worker Yes, not at all and I am convinced - in fact, I have been told since that that was the primary reason. It is really disappointing to hear that, quite sad really the way things were going. However I came back - unemployed for three months. [...] In retrospect, an experience, that one - I would never want to go through again but it certainly made me appreciate the strife that unemployment can actually cause not in terms of purchasing power and all that, that is copable, you can actually manage to cope with that, it is the personal status and dilemma that you find yourself in not being able to do things that you would quite like to and not being able to see any progress. Everybody wants to see progress in their life in some way or another.

Another worker similarly ascribed a change of career in midlife to changing personal priorities:

Worker Well my career basically up until [going to college] was purely in [industry]. But virtually from day one it was the management side I was a management trainee/apprentice, because management trainees were just coming in in those days. I started off, as I say, as a management trainee. On the production side. Moved very quickly towards the administration, shipping, export, admin side ... and hovered in between those two sorts of stools from the time I was 20. I left to go back to full time education at 37. [...]

CC And what was it that led you at that age, 37, mid career, to decide you wanted to go back to -

Worker Purely dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction with the whole scheme of things. Dissatisfaction with the aims and objectives o' what we were trying to do. And as far as I was concerned we were not - from being an out and out capitalist, you know, that profit generated jobs, jobs generated wages, wages generated a high quality o' life sort of syndrome, began to question that whole scenario. What am I doing with my life. Can I do something more useful. The whole time I'd been in management, the whole time I'd been in production, I'd also attended college on a regular basis, and had picked up a fair degree of I think expertise in that fields. Began to say how can I use that expertise to help people. [...] Now at the same time I think it would be unfair not to mention, the company I was in was small, it was dynamic, it was becoming very successful, but unfortunately it was one member of management too many. Instead of five of us there were six of us. It wasn't a happy situation. Where does one person's responsibility end, where does another one's start? There was continual conflict about areas of responsibility. [...]

CC Did you take redundancy at that point?

Worker No, it was a row. I had a row with the managing director. It was one of

these silly rows about nothing - well, it wasnae about nothing, it was about casual wages, and the use of casual wages within the company. And it got into one those, well if you don't apologise I'm not going to do this sort of thing. And I thought, aw, c'mon, this is just not me. I'm not happy. And I'm a great believer in people being happy. You've got to have job satisfaction. And I said, OK, I'm sorry, I'm going, and I'm going now, that's the best way. And he said, well if you're going, go. Right, so away. To be fair to the company I got a phone call later in the afternoon from the other directors saying, please, don't be so silly. But I'd already spoken over it with my wife and she said, look, we've no family, I've got a job, why don't you take a month - you're obviously not happy there. You're obviously confident that you can get a job somewhere. [...] During that time I thought very carefully about what I wanted to do ... came to the conclusion that I wanted to take formal educational qualifications to enable me to progress further.

For many of the practitioners then, major unplanned life events had brought about a change of direction. Faced with the disruptions consequent on serious illness, involuntary unemployment or simply the natural process of personal ambitions and values changing over time, they found themselves in a new kind of work situation which they had been able to anticipate only vaguely, if at all. The path to their present situation was significant for their current work because they felt that the lessons they had learned on the way were directly relevant. They understood from first hand experience what it meant to be unemployed, or to be forced by external circumstances or inner imperatives to abandon former projects. Practitioners' first-hand appreciation of these issues enabled them better to grasp the problems of unemployed people they came into contact with, and informed their intuitive sense of what might be necessary or valuable.

The themes of loss and change have long been recognised as central to the understanding that social workers require (Marris, 1974; Timms and Timms, 1977). So also has the idea of empathic understanding. The practitioners in this study did not however formulate these themes by reference to the language and literature of social work or related disciplines. Their understanding stemmed primarily from direct personal experience, and even among those with a social studies background the academic literature was not in any obvious way utilised to give form to this personal and universal experience.

8.5.4 Political inclinations

The practitioners were acutely aware that in being involved with responses to unemployment they were working in a politically sensitive arena. At the time of the study no-one could fail to be conscious of the fact that unemployment was a major issue of public concern, and was the area of public policy which perhaps attracted more general criticism than any other. The practitioners were also alert to the fact that some government responses to unemployment, and in particular the programmes of the Manpower Services Commission which they themselves were frequently involved in implementing, were widely regarded as dubious. The practitioners frequently criticised these programmes in private. They understood only too well that as representatives of charitable or quasi-charitable organisations, dependent upon public funding, they had to be very circumspect in engaging in public criticism of economic and social policy. One practitioner however was strongly of the opinion that, having accepted public funding, a voluntary organisation ought not to challenge the system which funded it:

Worker I think if you have accepted money to do something as say [an MSC scheme], then you must do it. Certainly I think there is a certain amount of leeway and that is understood and you can exploit that leeway but I don't think that you should use that to subvert - is really what I am saying - as I think that for any society, and social grouping, there are rules and regulations which govern behaviour and, once they go I think it really is anarchy

[...]

CC One of the moral values, if you like, is that voluntary organisations often claim is a concern for social justice. If the operation of [MSC schemes] is socially unjust and I think one can make a good strong case in that area, isn't it a moral duty to challenge the system.

Worker Absolutely but not from inside. I don't see how you can morally challenge it if you have taken some sort of part in it.

Two dimensions of political interest can be distinguished in the practitioners' attitudes, values and dispositions. In the first place, the workers varied in the extent to which political concerns figured as important in their own personal priorities and analyses. At one extreme were those who were, or had been, formally involved as politicians or as members or staff of political parties. They were deeply interested in the political process and would tend to see a wide range of issues in political terms. At the other extreme could be found those workers who, while not unaware of prevailing issues, were simply not very interested in political discourse. They had little substantive to say in this area, tending to see the world in more personal terms. (This distinction is similar to Halmos's (1978) argument that in social welfare and elsewhere the world is

divided into 'personalists' and 'political change agents'). One practitioner expressed her personal position as follows:

CC You have said just now and previously that you are quite non political. I wonder if you would see the work that you do in this job as either supporting or disagreeing with the views of any political party?

Worker No, I don't personally think so. I think that I would have arguments with any government which was in if there were inequities in the system. But I suppose outsiders would see us much more leaning towards socialist principles - socialist with a small 's'! I wouldn't put it any stronger than that. I think there's certainly members on our management committee who are quite radical. But there are other members of our management committee who are quite conservative with a small 'c' who would fight away from anything that begged coming down one side or the other. And I would tend to agree with them. I mean I don't - this is a terrible thing to admit, but I'm really not anything. I think I've voted for every political party except communist, 'cos there's never ever been one - oh well, there is one standing here now - but I mean, I am very naive politically and tend to vote for the person. That's wrong or whatever. But in a way it's easier for me to keep the apolitical front going, for the organisation, than it was if I was standing for the SDP or the local Tory candidate or whatever. I think we must lean to - we must have socialist tendencies, we must have, because I think our main job is to fight inequities. But it's not upfront. Partly that is me; if I was a different kind of body I've no doubt whatsoever the organisation would have taken on a different -.

The second dimension of political interest is simply that of socialism against conservatism. While it was not the intention to quantify or describe in full the specific political sympathies of the workers in this study, broadly they fell into three camps. The largest group, about half (eight out of fourteen), could be described as sympathetic or committed to traditional Labour socialism. They favoured remedies of the kind long associated with postwar Keynesian economics and the welfare state. The remainder of the practitioners divided about equally into two groups (each of three out of fourteen). The first of these could be called social democrats; while generally somewhat socialist in their orientation, they were unimpressed by the current performance of the Labour Party and sympathetic to criticisms from the Liberal and centre-left parts of the political spectrum. The remaining group of practitioners appeared to have predominantly bourgeois sympathies, although did not necessarily claim to vote for the Conservative Party.

The following extracts will illustrate both the degree of political interest and the specific political sympathy, since practitioners did not make the distinction which is

being employed here. In reality of course, the lack of political content in some practitioners' accounts of their dispositions and actions makes it more a matter of conjecture what their sympathies might be. It was also clear, however, that people's claims about their political sympathies should not be taken at face value, since they would often volunteer inconsistent or contradictory information. Perhaps the clearest example of this phenomenon was provided by the practitioner with a business background who considered himself a socialist at heart, had belonged to a local Conservative club, and claimed always to vote Liberal.

Certain workers in an unemployed workers' centre were the most clearly and strongly politically committed. They possessed a highly developed analysis of the political problem of unemployment and were also politically highly active themselves. They saw themselves as advocates for the unemployed:

CC So you're saying, you know what the issues are for the unemployed and you are going to convey that to people who probably don't understand it?

Worker That's it, we are going to put that point of view, it is often a more radical point of view as well which isn't always going to win the day obviously but it is going to raise the issue. When there are people discussing things there is always going to be a point of view from somebody that is a representative of the unemployed and it is important from our point of view to be involved in all these various areas. Also as a two way thing, not only are we giving to them but we are also receiving information back from them that is beneficial that we can pass on through our newsletter, our fact sheet, our advice desk through direct contact with groups about opportunities that are available in different areas for unemployed people, so it is a two way process.

However, the workers at this centre judged that they could not allow the organisation to achieve too much political prominence because of the threat this would entail to the funding of their major activities; one was contemptuous of the sort of political extremism that could imperil their survival. The workers were nevertheless positive that unemployment must be treated as a political problem. One identified an important role for the trade unions in this respect:

CC I understand that for you the trade union movement is centrally important in terms of responding to unemployment more generally as well. Could you expand a bit on that - why do you think the trade unions should be having such a key role in responding to unemployment because I don't think everybody in the unions is quite so enthusiastic.

Worker One of the largest moving forces for this centre to open was the trade union and trades council and the trade union movement locally. It comes

back to something I mentioned earlier on - I think it is only with the genuine partnership of the unemployed and the employed that we will ever manage to get rid of the yoke of unemployment in our society and the only way we historically have organised the employed, is through the trade unions and it is a logical [link].

CC Do you think that trade unions are an effective or appropriate movement for organising the unemployed?

Worker No - not directly. I am very sceptical of any movement to try and replicate the National Union of Unemployed Workers. There have been some attempts at that. However what we have done here, is we are all members of [a local trade union branch] but what we successfully do is we keep people in membership even when they have left their Community Programme job so there is a lot of people in our branch membership who are unemployed.

One worker spoke of his low regard for the non-political approach that had been tried out in some of the first unemployed workers' centres:

Worker I had also been in contact with a number of people who had bumped into unemployed centres which were beginning to spring up subsequent to the Newcastle venture and I was very aware of the sort of approaches that I would not wish to be all that closely involved in.

CC Which would those have been?

Worker The tea and sympathy basically approach - you are unemployed, we will provide you with a tea urn or a coffee urn, you can come in here, we can have a chat. There would possibly be a pool table, we will maybe have a tranny radio in the corner and at the end of the day you just go out again - sorry you could maybe read newspapers. That sort of attitude of dejection and depression and passive opposition to unemployment, waiting for the next unemployed demo to come along which was a feature of a number of unemployed centres. There would maybe be a few national and DHSS leaflets lying around but that would be about it and when I looked at that sort of approach I was quite convinced that I didn't want anything to do with that at all and that characterised some of the views of some of the people who were involved in the setting up of this Centre. At one of the first committee meetings, someone said 'oh I think I could get a piano to the centre' and they had a piano - marvellous idea! - you are unemployed so you sit in the corner and bash out the piano and go home at the end of the day. You pass your time in the unemployed centre and that's the last thing I wanted to see.

CC Is that because you don't think there is any place for tea and sympathy or -

Worker If there is a place I am not immediately aware of what the place is and

(b) I am not that sort of person. I think if you see an injustice in the world, the last thing you want to do is just sit down and possibly cogitate about it or just muse over it - you do something about it. I hope that this centre is a 'doing' centre rather than 'let's just think about it' centre.

Workers at this centre defined the centre's political role as 'making the bullets for others to fire'. Rather strong moral pressure was applied to employees of the centre to engage in political and trade union activities and although the official line was that the specific direction of individuals' political activities was their own affair, it was evident that anyone with non-socialist inclinations would have found the environment quite uncomfortable:

CC So from what you were saying [earlier], you would expect certainly a high degree of sympathy from your own workforce to the trade unions.

Worker Absolutely.

CC Do you have a closed shop in effect - do you require them to join?

Worker No. [...] The management committee encourage all employees to become members of the trade union and that is actually in the contract that goes out to people: the appropriate one is, etc. etc. During an interview we normally ask the question 'what is your attitude to trade unions and their role in the struggle against unemployment - has it been a positive one, are they doing enough'. We often ask them what other forces in society could be harnessed to do more to help unemployment, for instance the churches, politicians, but we do stress to people that this is a TUC centre and a lot of our funding comes from the trade union movement and a lot of the members of the management committee are active trade unionists. We are part of the labour movement, it is as blunt as that.

For one worker in an unemployed workers' centre however, it was difficult to reconcile a general personal sympathy with the Labour Party with dissatisfaction with some of its elements and with the trades unions. There was also felt to be a risk that too strident support of a political party or the trade unions would alienate potential centre users. The result was ambivalence:

CC Do you see your work as agreeing with or even as opposed to the policies of any political party - your work at the centre?

Worker I've endeavoured to be political! It agrees with some politics, it disagrees with others. That is not my concern. Political with a small 'p' - to me there's a place for that, very definitely. Party politics get in my way - now I'm not doing myself any good by saying that. I have avoided them. I have deliberately taken a stance of standing back from -. I mean we've a very clear left wing and right wing in this area, and I do not form with

any of them, and I've made a point of standing back from them.

CC But you have been a member of the Labour Party?

Worker Oh aye, and I'm still a member of the Labour Party. Again it's this thing about creating barriers, if it's stopping anyone coming. And I think if you very clearly say I support this or that -. There are issues of course that we feel strongly about. And I really have to analyse whether they're personal issues or whether they're issues that concern the work that you're trying to do. You have to assess that. But I very deliberately try and stay back from party politics. Some things that we'll do, some things that -

CC Do people ever say to you, look what we need is jobs, everybody's agreed about that, the party that's more interested in providing jobs is, for argument's sake, the Labour Party, therefore you ought to be supporting the Labour Party in your work. What would you say to that kind of argument?

Worker Yes, probably, aye. My opinion and I think the consensus of opinion of people in here, the Labour Party is the one, and yes we will support them generally.

CC But you don't do that in your job as organiser here?

Worker I don't present the centre as a Labour Party thinking centre, I don't, because I still feel that unemployment's a wider issue. I don't want to close the door to anyone. [...]

CC In working here, the solutions that you're looking for to the problems that you're working with are not, as it were, through the political route, are they?

Worker We use the political route in many ways when we require support, when we need a voice which often we do. If you need a voice for specific issues, yes we definitely use that route.

CC But you wouldn't want to commit the centre publicly to any political stance?

Worker No. I mean, I think it's obvious that it leans that way and I think that's the way I would like it to stay leaning towards the Labour because I think it's obvious that they are the party that are working with the working classes.

A worker in a volunteer bureau was well aware that government policies inevitably thrust volunteering into the political arena, but nevertheless wished to avoid association with any specific party:

CC It seems to me that you are dealing with volunteers who predominantly are unemployed and that has obviously got to be related to the political and economic situation. What role do you think the bureau has in terms of either complying with it or making it easier for the government, or in conversely articulating criticism. Is there any political position implicit in being a volunteer bureau?

Worker [...] Primarily we are here to help volunteers to see what they can do in the community and to let the community recruit if you like and have a focal point for volunteering. Various pressures are then put on us from that, the pressures of funding whereas the funding body can say 'we want this from you'. Now that's fair enough if that falls in nicely with volunteering and doesn't undermine the fact that it is voluntary. Then from government training initiatives that will suggest to a person 'if we can't find you a job, you should do voluntary work' and we feel that we have to look at this and respond because again it must be voluntary and the suggestion that if you don't volunteer, then your benefit will be cut then undermines it being voluntary. So you must respond politically to some of the things that are happening. I think as well being involved so much in the community and with volunteers, you must respond to the needs in the community that need a political solution. [...] Now I don't know if we have got to make the representation somewhere and I hope that it's a political stance on behalf of the community and that it's a apolitical [sic] stance.

CC Can it be?

Worker Yes I think it can because we are concerned with the essence of what is voluntary and voluntary as being involved in the community from time immemorial and that is something that you choose to do for your neighbour. [...] I hope that at the root of what we are doing will be this business of voluntarily being involved in the community and not just responding to whatever party is in power. So we are speaking up on the essence of involvement rather than the political statement on voluntary as opposed to paid.

The views of one practitioner in the field of community business development exemplified several features of current debate in the political centre. He favoured the idea of empowerment and expressed reservations about the ability of very large local government bureaucracies to respond sensitively to local need. A political pluralist, he felt that neither local government nor private enterprise ought to have a monopoly of local services; local initiative ought to be encouraged. Of community enterprise he made the following observations:

CC Do you think that the community enterprise movement implies any particular political philosophy?

Worker It actually must in a sense align with the ideas of probably the left - not Militant or anything like that - but I mean it's a fundamentally socialist view that it is allowing people power to determine where they are going. That aspect of it you would certainly see it aligns strongly with a socialist point of view. However the interesting thing is, and the beauty of it I think that it can attract, is that it is actually instilling in a lot of people's heads notions of enterprise and the bit -. Remember that they still have to operate within the business field so you are instilling capitalist doctrine in them as well and in that sense you would traditionally say naturally they would align with the Conservatives. Now where the middle ground comes into it, I am not sure. I can see it being attractive to the Liberal things but in terms of basic political philosophies, capitalism and socialism thing, it lends itself more, from my own personal sway, to be more of a socialist thing. [...]

So I think if any party in Britain were capable of taking it on properly ... you would imagine the Labour Party could probably take that on board. The practical implementation of it would be entirely different because I think that they are not equipped to do that because they suffer in my opinion from the same problems that the Tories tend to do and it is a form of power dictation, paternalistic socialists and you have got the dictatorial Tories, that sort of thing. Now the SDP, Liberals: the Liberals could, in effect, take it on board quite neatly according their ideologies but I tend to say that I wouldn't like the movement to align itself with anybody because I think that's dangerous and what we often say to groups is if you are moving into community enterprise or thinking about it, you are going to be involved in politics. It is not apolitical, community business, but it is politics with a small 'p' not party politics

Finally we may note that it was not as straightforward to infer bourgeois sympathies in the small number of relevant cases as it was to draw conclusions in respect of the practitioners already cited. This was because there sometimes seemed to be a contradiction between the values they claimed and their true sympathies. They might clothe their projects in a rationale of left-of-centre argument, which clearly is normative in the field, and yet show alignment with the social values of the market, self-reliance and individualism. Their attitudes, personal priorities and language sometimes suggested indirectly that they were not socialists at heart, even though in one case they claimed to be. Be that as it may, it can be stated with all confidence that practitioners quite commonly make statements of political and social value which are mutually inconsistent. This probably does not usually represent deceitfulness or self delusion; it is just that people can well be attracted by the positive aspects of different political philosophies, and do not always pursue successfully the resolution of the conflicts that ensue.

8.6 Action skills

8.6.1 Introductory comment

It was explained in Chapter 6 that the approach adopted in this study was intended to describe in some respects how practitioners behave, as well as collecting their own accounts and formulations of the issues they were working on. During the fieldwork process therefore one task was to observe and interpret the practitioners' actions in relation to colleagues, users, enquirers, people in other agencies, and so forth. This area of observation depends more heavily on my interpretation of the meaning of the minutiae of social interaction than do some other topics discussed in this chapter. Whereas much of the content of practitioners' knowledge, beliefs and opinions can be conveyed here in their own words or a close paraphrase of them, reportage of their behaviour and its social context depends on my summation of small signs exhibited over periods of hours or days. It follows then that the interpretation of behaviour must be done with due caution. On the other hand, there is more substance in this material than a single observer's unconfirmed impressions. The practitioners themselves were generally quite aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and were able to respond to invitations to discuss them. My understanding of individuals was often enhanced by comments volunteered privately by people who worked with them. Further, the fieldwork process often made it possible to discuss events retrospectively with the identified practitioners, which allowed some insight into their perceptions and some degree of comparison with my own.

The following subsections will cover a selection of 'action skills', which refers to the basic personal competences necessary for practice. What is at issue here is not the theoretical, specialised or highly context-dependent knowledge which the practitioner requires for the effective performance of a specific occupational role; it is rather a matter of examining those general and basic skills which are necessary in any field of activity involving organisation, communication, and the disciplined use of the self in social interaction.

It is not the intention here to provide anything approaching a social psychology of welfare practice, or even a catalogue of action skills. The aim is simply to substantiate and illustrate the claim that action skills play an indispensable role in the business of translating theory into practice. It is argued in effect that we cannot properly

understand why practitioners act as they do unless we consider, in addition to their knowledge and theoretical understanding, what personal and interpersonal skills they possess.

8.6.2 Skills in working relationships

A comfortable majority of the fourteen identified practitioners seemed to possess very good all-round skills in conducting working relationships with a range of different people and in a range of different contexts. I observed them handling different situations with competence and flair, and received favourable comments about their personal presentation and helpfulness from colleagues and others. For example, a worker received a constant stream of enquirers in her office, with whom she established obvious good rapport and whom she helped in various ways. Sometimes this would be with concrete and practical requests, but just as often it would be a matter of offering advice, moral support or commiseration on matters that might be related to the organisation's purposes or might be simply personal worries. This worker displayed openness, friendliness, and a skill at placing people at their ease. The sheer volume of callers, who mostly were previously known, was testament to the perceived helpfulness of the worker. Another worker displayed similar characteristics in a comparable environment, including the willingness to get involved with anyone's problem, great or small. Both of these practitioners were able to relate successfully with people of widely differing status, from senior figures in positions of power and authority to the most timid and junior enquirer. Clearly, both possessed high levels of social skill and confidence, applicable to a wide range of situations, which they put to good effect in their work. It is perhaps worth remarking that such skills were not necessarily accompanied by a particularly incisive mind, extensive knowledge or shrewd judgement. It is rather that the practitioners with good social skills were able to conduct successful working relationships even when handicapped by relative ignorance on a particular topic, or when they did not immediately grasp the full import of what was being said; they had the awareness which enabled them to sense and make good any deficiencies in their own understanding.

Generally speaking the practitioners had acquired interpersonal skills which were particularly relevant to their own jobs. Those whose work involved a major element of counselling, of whom the volunteer bureau workers are the clearest example, had developed at least a basic competence in counselling skills; in fact, all the workers from

time to time needed basic counselling skills to deal with unemployed people, their own staff and colleagues, and other enquirers.

Workers who had to address outside groups and meetings on the subject of their work had learned to cope, with greater or lesser comfort and success, with this situation. One volunteer bureau worker had hit upon the idea of using pictures of volunteers at work in different situations to bring home more clearly to potential recruits what might be involved.

Workers understood, at least intuitively, that it was necessary on occasion to exert authority over colleagues, users and others. One explained the limits of the conduct she would tolerate from junior employees in areas such as punctuality, reliability and compliance with instructions. A worker in an unemployed workers' centre acknowledged a struggle between users and staff over a whole range of issues affecting the use of the centre, which had culminated in the senior workers having ultimate sanction; this was despite a fair amount of libertarian rhetoric. A worker explained that in dealing with children, and by implication adults too, 'you have to carry your own authority' and not rely on the formal authority of an institution.

A skill universally required was that of conducting negotiations, in order for example to question benefits payments; to arrange a volunteer placement; to obtain a grant or other resource. One worker had learned through many years' experience to combine forcefulness and assertiveness in negotiation with an unfailing personal warmth, concern, cheerfulness and good humour; this was an extremely persuasive mixture.

Group situations occur commonly in the field. The formulation of goals and objectives, the appraisal of issues and the assessment of alternatives, and key decision making in general are, at least in principle, usually the business of committees and similar groups. On occasion I observed workers who were able to combine, to excellent effect, an authoritative analysis of an issue with the ability to argue it well and overcome the reluctance of others. And in a different but related sphere, service users are frequently catered for by means of groups rather than on an individual basis.

My observations were however that difficulties in the handling of groups often impaired the effectiveness of workers and their organisations. For example, in a small staff meeting the senior member of the organisation who chaired it failed to explain the agenda properly, and was evidently unclear in his own mind about the exact purposes

of the meeting. Issues which seemed to be important were not addressed and discussion went off on tangents; there was avoidance of the difficult and sensitive areas, in this case the possibility of staff redundancy. In another, large, staff meeting the senior members more or less dictated how things were to be done. Some of the staff members resented this treatment but felt that it was not worth challenging, or that they were powerless to challenge it. In a third case of a staff meeting, the key worker in the organisation had to mediate between an incompetent and insensitive committee member who wished to exert authority in inappropriate and unhelpful ways, and the staff who lacked motivation but feared for their positions.

While therefore in general the practitioners were effective in interpersonal skills, there were several cases where they exhibited definite areas of weakness. There was no apparent link in this with age, training, qualification or experience. Amongst the two-thirds or so of the identified practitioners who seemed to be good all-rounders, there were about the same numbers of men and women; but amongst the one-third or so of whom I had grounds for suspecting that difficulties in interpersonal skills regularly impaired their effectiveness, all were men. Grounds for such suspicion were my direct observation of their behaviour with colleagues and others, or with myself; and the private comments of others.

An examination of these areas of difficulty in interpersonal skills suggests that the origins did not lie in the lack of a particular behavioural repertoire. It was not, for example, that individuals were unable in general to communicate their ideas clearly; it was rather that there were certain subjects or situations which they found difficult to manage effectively. Insofar as the origins of these difficulties could be discerned within the confines of this study, it seemed that it was aspects of the personality which were responsible. This will be illustrated in the following examples.

A practitioner espoused a range of ideas and values which were normative in the context, and generally sensible and rational in themselves. However, his presentation of these ideas detracted from their acceptance. He was experienced as didactic and verbose, inclined to be overbearing. While being highly articulate, he was effectively relatively insensitive to his impact on others; yet he claimed to possess qualities of sensitivity and empathy. His genuine enthusiasm for the project was only too likely to come across as a tiresome prolixity. The most probable explanation of these and a number of other characteristics, taken together with the practitioner's own views, is that this was an insecure and over-defended personality who tried too hard to justify

himself and in the process frequently fell into traps of his own making. For example, he advanced proposals which were not properly thought out and then struggled to defend the indefensible. His handling of criticism was often dysfunctional; he was unable to 'hear' what was being said. Over a period of time he had alienated a whole range of influential outsiders, jeopardising the future of the entire scheme. His response to the situation was to blame others for failures, in contradiction to his own declared values.

A practitioner had many years' experience in his field and was a knowledgeable, widely known and respected figure. He regularly gave support and advice to other voluntary organisations; he was well versed in the practices, conventions and tricks of the trade. Within his own organisation however he found it difficult to handle some fairly obvious organisational problems. He was reluctant to tackle what he himself regarded as inefficient working practices, because of the turmoil this might cause. An astute colleague offered a rather radical analysis of the situation, but found that the practitioner in question tended to avoid the conflicts which lay beneath the calm outward appearance of the agency. It was my general impression that in certain key areas the practitioner sometimes took the line of least resistance when his undoubted intellect could have pointed to the need for more radical action. In meetings for example, he might propose postponing a thorny issue or remitting it to another quarter rather than risk upsetting people present.

In interview with myself, a worker was frequently evasive and obtuse in his response. Questions relating to politically sensitive aspects of the agency's functioning received stereotyped answers designed for public consumption. Questions of a more personal kind were deflected by flippancy or throwing it back; sometimes discomfort was indicated by long pauses, sighs, fluffing the sentence, blustering or incoherence. Now while there were good political reasons for a possible reluctance to be candid, the manner of the worker's denials and reluctance created an impression of untrustworthiness. The worker described his role in the phrase 'I'm a con merchant, almost'; this is a kind of joke which might well rebound.

8.6.3 Skills in organisation

Practitioners in the field of this study, as in any other area of social welfare, require a degree of competence in organising the use of their own and others' resources

effectively. In the very smallest organisations of only one or two staff, organising oneself and running the organisation are practically indistinguishable. Some of the organisations studied did, however, have appreciable numbers of staff, and in these cases there is a distinction to be made between organising one's own time effectively and running the organisation to good effect.

A worker clearly identified herself as by temperament a 'doer', who preferred always to be directly involved with service users rather than take a role more behind the scenes. She successfully managed to keep going a very large number of disparate activities at any one time. She defined herself as a bad manager, lacking any skill in this area, and for this reason had chosen deliberately to keep her own organisation small while supporting new initiatives by others. In this case therefore the worker possessed excellent skills in self-organisation while claiming to be poor at organising others.

A worker in a relatively larger organisation was known by two of his senior colleagues for his preference for being directly and personally involved in as much as possible of what was going on. While his enthusiasm and skill were undoubted, it seemed likely that his style of working had tended to eclipse the less confident or skilled members of staff.

A worker who had responsibility for ten or so mostly rather young and inexperienced staff consciously conducted herself in ways which she felt would conduce to their learning. She showed staff by direct example how to receive enquirers properly in the office, and how to deal with an awkward customer. She conveyed praise and censure clearly and in such a way as to instruct not only the object of such comment, but other watching colleagues also.

Another worker was also mindful of the need to instruct young and inexperienced staff and develop their skills. He commented on his role as follows:

Worker I think everybody has different styles of working and the standing joke at the centre was 'I am the expert at delegating things' - I am famous for it, I am great at delegating but that is part of a management function to delegate a lot of things and give people trust and confidence to do things. I would say people are happy to do that as long as they know that they have the management around it, if there is a problem they come back. I would say probably my two main skills are delegating and problem solving, I am pretty good at that and finding angles out of things.

It is worth noting in conclusion that none of the workers in this study received

anything approaching good supervision, with the managerial and developmental functions identified in the social work literature. The great majority indeed received practically no supervision at all. Those who were the senior members of their organisation's staff obviously had no superior to turn to, and were in principle responsible to committee chairpersons. In practice, the full time senior worker is nearly always much better informed than any committee member, who in any case does not generally possess the time, the skills or the authority to provide professional supervision. In the cases of those practitioners who were not themselves the senior employee, supervision was equally lacking if for slightly different reasons. Amongst these could be identified lack of managerial knowledge and skill, coupled perhaps with an organisational culture rather suspicious of the trappings of professionalism and bureaucracy. All this illustrates a familiar dilemma for the voluntary sector. On the one hand, informality of control and loosely defined purposes may facilitate initiative, flair and resourcefulness; on the other, small voluntary organisations are deficient in the inbuilt resources needed to combat a lack of sensibly defined objectives or deficiencies in the capacities of staff members.

8.6.4 The place of skill

Evidence from the field studies corroborates, then, the importance of action skills to understanding the whole process of how practitioners translate their beliefs into practice. In order to do so, practitioners needed such skills in working relationships as those of counselling, public speaking, the use of authority, negotiation, and effective work with groups. They also needed, for example, to be effective in organising themselves and other people; they needed to lead, guide and manage. All this is no more than one would expect from the standard conceptions of the professional role.

A number of practitioners proved to be sometimes, or frequently, relatively ineffective in certain kinds of situations demanding action skills. However, it seemed that their failures were not in general due to a want of basic skills as such, if by that we mean the general capacities to communicate accurately or pursue activities diligently and systematically using recognised methods. It was rather that the failures suggested the existence of difficulties at a more fundamental level. In several cases these seemed to be due to personality problems. In other cases simple ignorance evidently contributed to ineffectiveness, but this seemed to be less damaging unless the practitioner was insensitive to the possibility.

The practitioner's exercise of action skills sometimes provides, then, a window onto his basic knowledge, beliefs and dispositions. While simple inexperience may sometimes account for the lack of effective action skills, it seemed that this was not generally true for the practitioners in this study, who with few exceptions had wide relevant experience. Action skills are therefore a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for effectiveness in practice, and for applying theory in practice. These conclusions are consistent with the original action model, and will be incorporated into the revised action model to be discussed in the next chapter.

8.7 Community development as a professional discipline

This final section will consider to what extent the practitioners could be said to possess a general theory, method or approach. I shall focus on their notions of community development. Now it was shown in Chapter 4 that community work is far from being a precise discipline. In a loose way all the practitioners could be said to be doing 'community work', particularly since the term has been vastly diluted in recent years by the usages of the Manpower Services Commission and people on its schemes. A somewhat stronger significance attaches to 'community development' but as we shall see, this did not amount to anything like an agreed definition. One worker remarked parenthetically:

Worker There isn't a right or wrong way to go about social work or community development, it's all shades of grey.

CC Would you call yourself a community developer?

Worker In my more lucid moments, yes. I think probably, yes. A community enabler, I think.

In view of all this, it may be asked whether there is any point in singling out 'community work' as a potential focus for knowledge, theory or professional skill. The argument for doing so rests on the consideration that community development, with its close cousin community education, is the nearest thing to a professional discipline informing practice in the field of this study. It often featured in discussions with the practitioners and was easily recognised as a relevant scheme of ideas.

It will be shown that, important though the idea of community development might be, it is not adequate either to explain the empirical findings, or as prescription. I shall conclude therefore by considering how better to approach the explanation of the practitioners' action.

Many of the practitioners manifested some appreciation and practical command of concepts of community work, community development or community education. It cannot be claimed, however, that they subscribed to any rigorously defined common body of theory or prescription. Their ideas about community development are illustrated in the following excerpts.

A community education trained worker in an unemployed workers' centre explained the

role she envisaged in introducing unemployed people to new activities:

CC Would you see yourself as a kind of adult educationist, something like that, is that how you would describe this role of getting people to try things?

Worker No, I'm not an educationalist in any - no, not at all, 'cos I don't know [about the details of different activities]. What I can say to them is I know how you can find out. I see myself as an enabler, and an animator. No, get people the confidence to say, hoot. I'll hold your hand, or I'll push you. I mean I wouldn't do it beyond anyone's capability, I wouldn't give anyone false hopes, that's one thing I would never do. You know, I'll never say to anyone coming in here, I think you can be a brain surgeon. I think everyone has something they can do, everyone. I might do it by saying, come and be a volunteer in the centre for six months. And at the end of six months, you suddenly - I mean it happened with [a centre user]. You know, when he suddenly produced this paper on caring for the elderly in the community. [...] It's just providing the opportunities, providing the easy access, letting them see the opportunities for themselves, letting them talk.

One practitioner had substantial experience of mainstream community development from his social work training and later work, and had followed this with a considerable amount of practice in the supervision of community work. He was generally well informed about current developments in social welfare, and from time to time supervised social work students. He described his own role as that of community social worker in the following terms:

Worker Well what I would mean by community social work would be people from the social work background working with groups in the community with a view to assisting self help community development as an alternative focus or complementary to a social work department's inevitable focus on individual care. That would be my understanding of community social work. There is a big overlap between that and community education - the whole community development approach is basic.

CC Would you distinguish between community social work and community development?

Worker (Pause) No I wouldn't. I would see community development as the method of community social work if you like. But basically the link with that and community education is that it is an educational enterprise. Social work is an educational enterprise.

CC That's perhaps a neglected idea in British social work I think.

Worker That may well be. Certainly in my training that was spelled out very much. The overall enterprise is educational in the sense of helping people

to become more competent and confident in the management of their own affairs. That is an educational enterprise.

CC Is that the kind of idea that you would see as animating your present work?

Worker When I sit down and think about it - I would like to think that that was the case. Supporting voluntary organisations and helping them in all ways possible to reflect on what they are doing so that they can do it better. It's a remove - this sort of role is not so much. There is an element of community development but it is as much about community organisation, not in the American sense but in the sense of helping organisations be more effective. It is easy to talk about it in a grandiose fashion but, on a day to day basis, it is fairly basic.

This passage is of some interest since much of it comprises a statement of the classic goals of community development, and the relationship of that activity to mainstream social work. At the same time, although coming from a knowledgeable and experienced speaker, it contains an explicit equation of community development with community social work which, in the light of the authoritative discussion of this issue in the Barclay Report (1982), ought to be distinguished from each other.

A worker in an unemployed workers' centre offered the formulation of community development which appears below:

CC Picking up on one of the things that we've mentioned a number of times and appears in the literature and this is community development. You have spoken about working on community development principles. Now that word or those words mean a lot of different things to different people I was wondering what your understanding of those ideas was?

Worker I am not too sure of whether it accords with the text book view of community development but as far as I am concerned, community development is easier to explain by saying what it is not. And it is not sort of people coming into an organisation or up to an organisation and asking for something to be done for them or done unto them. It is an approach of an organisation which encourages people to participate in the solution of their own problems. In fact we would regard this centre for instance as being a facilitator, as providing the mechanism for people to solve their own problems. We stretch that right through all the activities within the centre right from the advice side of things where we don't just give advice to someone. We hope that in the way we give advice we, in a way, reduce the necessity for someone to have to come back if a similar type of problem crops up again. So we would hope that they were able to go through the motions themselves the next time having learned from the experiences. So in a way we are helping the community to develop itself

as much as to develop the community.

CC What is the community in this particular context here?

Worker Ostensibly the unemployed but we have never [for example] turned anybody away that's in employment with an industrial relations problem or we have never turned a pensioner away.

CC In your view is there a difference between community development and self help?

Worker Yes. I would think that community development largely aims itself towards the sectors of the community which, at least in the initial stages, need a wee bit more help and support and guidance and direction, whatever it may be. Self help to my mind tends to conjure up the picture of middle class persons who have within themselves the capacity to be able to solve their own problems and choose not to or choose to do so. I think what we are talking about is trying to facilitate people who are not well disposed to be able to solve their own problems but we help in the approach of the centre to encourage them to self confidence and then through that to self knowledge and general knowledge in solving specific problems.

CC Right. Another one of the words that is used, of course, is mutual aid. Do you regard that term as applicable either?

Worker I think it is but not one hundred per cent. I think it is applicable to a lot of what goes on in here.

CC Would you describe yourself ... as a community development worker?

Worker A rather grandiose title isn't it?

CC I mean if you had to give yourself a label, would that be as good a one as any?

Worker I think it would be, yes.

CC That would be the nearest you might claim to - I hesitate to use the word 'professional' - a professional training.

Worker Yes. But that's not me taking the title unto myself rather than allowing that title to have equal credibility on the shoulders of many of the unemployed that have been in here for some time.

It will be noted that the last two practitioners quoted both wished to disclaim any 'grandiose' notions of professionalism. It might be that this reflects a genuine, and indeed realistic, estimate that the craft of community development is not a complicated

affair, and ought not to be over-inflated. However, disavowals of professionalism should not be taken at face value in community work. The culture of community work embodies a persistent strain of anti-professionalism, which in essence suspects all professions of usurping the rightful power of the citizen. One worker made the following observation:

Worker I think there is a problem from the ... point of view of unemployed people as to what they see in a professional and I think largely the difficulties caused are the approach of a lot of professionals which is the exact opposite of community development - it is the 'doing unto' syndrome. ...The vast majority of unemployed people see the professional coming in in their car and going home in their car at the end of the night back to their not too humble semi detached in suburbia and the image of the Deux Chevaux with the Greenpeace badge on the back.

One of the key ideological and practical objectives of community development is to gain for the citizen the control of influence and resources which is usually exercised by professionals. In keeping with this stance therefore, community development workers wish to avoid in their own practice the diseases of professionalisation, and quite often express ideals of anti-elitism and anti-professionalism. In reality however, community workers themselves usually exercise a degree of power, influence and discretion quite in keeping with their position as relatively low-status professionals. In the cases of the workers quoted above, each in fact exercised considerable professional influence in their respective spheres, and showed no particular discomfort in so doing; in one case this was markedly in contrast with the affected anti-professionalism.

Workers in projects concerned with training for employment and employment creation tended to espouse a hybrid ideology which drew on the one hand, from the lore of community work and its origins in social welfare practice and on the other, from the language of commerce and its origins in private enterprise. A worker concerned with community business development favoured the notion of 'animation awareness', which referred to generating interest in alternative employment strategies among the local population:

CC Another point I wanted to pick up from previous discussion was that you described part of your job as 'animation awareness'. What does that mean?

Worker [...] Awareness means, as it says, making people aware of a particular concept, making people aware of what is available. Making people aware of the state that they are in. Animation means that you then attempt to make them do something about it. Either face the problem; even analyse the problem and decide they're quite happy about the problem. You are bringing to the people, to a particular audience certain facts about that

audience, about the environment that audience lives in about certain elements that affect that audience. You then, to animate them, have to provide them with the vehicle which will then allow them to, if they wish, alter the situation. But to at least consider altering that situation. Analysing all the options that are open to them, and giving them the ability to do something about it. [...]

We're not government led - we're maybe government funded but we're not government led, we are part of the community. The community itself wants to help you. These people have brought in an organisational structure that wants to help you. Did you know that? Then saying, right, now you do know that, how can we animate you to do something about it. How do we get you to get up off your backside and consider the options that are open to you. Yes, one of the options is to divide your £40,000 [redundancy money] by 15 and get three and a half thousand or whatever it is per annum, plus interest, to live on till you get your thing. Yes, another option is to get a new car, have a holiday in Disneyland and drink the rest of it in the [local pub] and then go on the dole. But there's more to life than that. You have got skills. Your skills don't end with the man's job you had in [heavy industry]. What do you do for a hobby? What does your wife do for a hobby? Even the hobby that you did do, what skills is it made up of? Consider that. How could that be used? Where could you sell anything that you could make? Is there anybody willing to buy it?

The same worker employed a distinction between 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches to community business development which is familiar from community work. In the top down approach, an outside expert imposes a project on the local community without, initially, their full understanding or even necessarily their full cooperation. In the bottom up approach, it is first necessary to form a cohesive community group; then to raise their awareness of potential opportunities; then to look at business possibilities. The top down approach to community business is essentially the same as ordinary business development, and was seen as inevitable in the circumstances of that project. The bottom up approach was seen as intrinsically more appropriate, but requiring a very long term process to be carried out.

A worker involved with community business development understood that sphere of activity and mainstream community development as nearly indistinguishable in their basic objectives, and closely complementary in practical terms. The social objectives of community business were seen in the following terms:

Worker The social objectives are for example, to actually increase very generally the spirit of the neighbourhood, the spirit of the community, to increase people's hopes for the future, to see a progress in their life, to increase

their skills, not just being able to hit a hammer and nail straighter but actually to be able to speak to people and to move into areas of work and life in general that they've never entertained before. To take on management skills, to take on supervisory skills, to offer this whole - it's like a real injection of hope really in communities that have really been sort of knocked down and it is to get them back on this level of being. Self worth more than anything else.

CC Self worth and quality of life?

That is really what it comes down to at the end of the day. I would strongly argue that [the people that are actively involved with this project] have got an increase in the quality of life, have raised their aspirations about what they want their life to do.

Setting up a community business was seen as entailing a five stage process: 'pure animation' or engendering initial interest; formation of a steering group and drawing up a constitution; providing ongoing support and specialist training; giving expert financial and legal advice; and negotiating with politicians. This type of process model is very familiar in community work circles (for example, Henderson and Thomas, 1980b).

On the skills required for community business development work, this worker held the view that most of it was dealing with people.

Worker I would say that the personal development and community development are 60-70% of the skill that is required. [...] There is a skill involved in the whole process I would say it is probably in the community development communication type skills and that is one of being able to educate people. I'm not saying that you're the teacher - but being able to pass on information so that that information is taken in and digested.

He compared it with his previous experience which was more akin to social work:

Worker There is no difference, it is all communication, being able to communicate thoughts to people and get them motivated to take those thoughts on board and actually feel some confidence.

A worker concerned with the training of unemployed people likened the process of 'marketing' this training to the community worker's use of local contacts and knowledge:

Worker There is a lesson that ... keeps being learned, that you can't rely on anybody else be it the community education worker or the job centre to provide you with the people you need to make a course work or to make a scheme work, you are going to have to go and do it yourself, and people do. There is a major difference that everybody here [in the agency] is quite capable of going out to [local supermarket] and talking to people.

I asked how people were recruited for training courses:

CC Where do you find the people? Would you look in any particular place?

Worker [Everywhere], that's where they'd look. Basically it is about working on the community networks. That's where it starts and just being in contact with other workers. I was staggered when I came here because I really had no idea about the amount of sort of individual contact between [own agency's staff] and community education staff, there is actually quite a high level and it is all very private and quiet like the best in community work.

CC The best in community work! Do you think there's been a change in house style, if you like, over the last two or three years in terms of the outreach?

Worker Mmmm. It is being done. It is based on having a particular product to sell rather than just come along and get training.

CC I see so as you have firmed up your grasp of what it is you are trying to do you have been in a better position to go out and sell it if you like.

Worker Yes. And you have to sell it in missionary style, that's all there is to it when you are talking to people.

A worker who had trained in community education felt that he had learned most of what he knew about community development from his work experience rather than from his training:

Worker So I haven't done any major reading about what community development means. What I have looked at are some of the examples of other people in the field. I think there are a range of processes that people may go through and I think it will depend a lot on the objectives that you wish to achieve. For example, local authority housing you can use a community development approach to facilitate the implementation of certain decisions. You can take it further and actually try and influence those decisions or given not just influence but contribute and that is about setting up a certain kind of maintenance the other is that you may use a community development approach to do any kind of work at that level because it seems to me it is basically trying to get enough groups of people together and to give them capabilities of support, start making decisions and carrying them through. I think there are also disadvantages that can come up. One thing in discussion with people in community education for example it certainly came through that when you are talking about trying to reach the people that to some extent you want to try and guard against reaching the people who have already been reached and are doing something.

This worker recognised the need to relate sensitively to other initiatives in the community:

Worker I think you have to recognise ... that when you speak to folk on community groups as a new project firstly, it was quite wrong to go wading in, to elbow the folk out of the road sort of approach, therefore, folk want some kind of impression of what you have actually got to offer whether it something that is right for them and also if you pinch their punters you are not actually contributing to their centre.

Amongst the identified practitioners then, there existed a definite adherence to a loosely drawn but nevertheless recognisable doctrine of community development. The central ideas, corresponding to those appearing in the literature, emphasise a supporting, enabling or facilitating role in helping people to address the problems which they themselves must identify, with assistance from the worker. Community development is seen as a broadly educational process in which the worker raises aspirations and awareness, but refrains from direction; it encourages self responsibility. As one worker put it,

Worker The community development approach is ... saying, 'no, I'm not going to tell you how to do that, when you ask me for advice I am going to give you advice but ... I'm not going to do it for you, you're going to do it'.

Community development is acknowledged to be a slow process, and liable to take longer to achieve useful outcomes than direct action by professionals might require; but this was considered to be a price worth paying for the sake of the longer term educational benefit. One worker was scathingly critical about another organisation's failure, as he saw it, to apply its professed community development principles and its having resorted, for the sake of financial viability and visible results, to a 'top down' approach. It was recognised that local people might sometimes become impatient when faced with the community developer's expectation of self responsibility rather than direct service, and be inclined to ask the professional to use his skills to get practical results more quickly. Ultimately however, the educational and politicising aims of community development made it necessary to avoid anything too much resembling a managerial or conventional bureaucratic approach.

While therefore notions of community development circulated widely amongst the practitioners, their conceptions were mostly fairly primitive. A few showed a passing acquaintance with the literature; none could be said to have a good command of the limited theory which has appeared. In particular, detailed methods for the implementation in a specific context of the ideals quoted in this discussion were at best

only tentatively worked out, and had received no rigorous evaluation. Here as elsewhere, it was predominantly direct personal experience and the contacts made in working life which formed the frameworks practitioners used, and not any body of academic abstraction.

This last point can be amplified by referring back to the nature of practitioners' knowledge analysed in the early part of this chapter. It was shown there that practitioners often made good use of their previous education and work experience, whether or not it had any close relevance to their current practice, to provide themselves with some kind of general framework or orientation. Only comparatively rarely, however, did they seem to make any direct or rigorous application of such knowledge as they had thus acquired. Their analysis of the social issues with which they were involved was based in their personal experience rather than any identifiable corpus of professional ideology. Similarly, their day to day working precepts were formed primarily by their own concrete experience in the actual situation; they had not been acquired before taking up the work.

The practitioners were not, therefore, properly equipped with a professional discipline in which they (or anyone else) might have confidence. This was for several reasons. Community development has nowhere reached such a level of sophistication that it might adequately answer the concerns of the practitioners and projects described in this study. Besides, the practitioners were not very advanced exponents of the art, either in abstract discourse or in concrete practice. They frequently seemed to be unaware of their own areas of ignorance. These two aspects of the problem are probably not unrelated: if community development were theoretically more advanced, it might have made more of an impact on practitioners' training, awareness and competence than is actually the case. To these considerations we must add the fact that the detailed, context-specific knowledge and experience that would be needed to implement a community development approach effectively in voluntary projects on unemployment is also substantially lacking. Although the practitioners had built up a certain amount of expertise in their projects, they had to do so very largely without the benefit of a professional literature.

The practitioners evidently shared personal attributes and social values which are widespread in the social welfare field generally and to that extent, their ideology was not particularly distinguishable from that of mainstream social work and other related occupational groups. Not uncommonly it was a specific life experience which had

crucially formed the motivation to enter the field. On the other hand, a distinctive political philosophy was detectable particularly amongst the workers in the non-traditional organisations. This laid stress on the desirability of such things as participation, empowerment, and grass-roots involvement in opposition to elitism, bureaucracy and material and cultural impoverishment. These are social values which are indeed vigorously rehearsed in the literature of community work, and for which it is sometimes regarded as the radical fringe of established social work.

It was clear from the field studies that the action skills expected for the professing of community development are certainly essential to its successful practice, and also that in essence they do not differ from those widely regarded as necessary in any human service field. However, there is a matter of emphasis in that community development work tends to demand more in the political, organisational and public sphere, and less in the personal counselling sphere, than the mainstream of social work.

The practitioners were not only working at the fringes of knowledge; they also, as we have seen in the previous chapter, occupied a marginal position in relation to the institutions of social welfare. They were obliged to try and make sense of their situation with little in the way of authoritative guidance. They exercised their initiative and responsibility, and sought an active role rather than passively awaiting what fate might bring them; but often they could not be sure how to act for the best, and there were no reliable precedents either within their own experience or to be found in a body of professional knowledge. Often they could do no more than travel hopefully, while at the same time being carried along by tides of which they were only partly aware, and could seldom influence. We shall turn in the final chapter to a fuller analysis of how they coped.

CHAPTER 9

The structure of practical reasoning

9.1 Introduction

In section 6.7 it was explained that the set of operational constructs which had been arrived at by the conclusion of the pilot stage continued to be modified as the main body of data was analysed. Several relatively straightforward additions, also detailed in section 6.7, were introduced at the beginning of the main analysis process. Reference was made to the fact that, as the analysis of the field studies advanced, the set of operational constructs was partly replaced by a set of derived constructs. This much more fundamental recasting was done in order better to reflect the developing understanding of practitioners' use of knowledge, and of the other influences which affect the conduct of practice in the field selected for this study. At the same time, the action model was being successively reformulated for precisely the same reasons.

In this chapter I shall first review the adequacy of the operational constructs, and explain how the derived constructs were inferred in the light of the findings presented especially in Chapter 8. In section 9.3 I will comment similarly on the conception of theory and typology of knowledge advanced in Chapter 2. The next following section will consider the implications for the action model, and present the final version of it. The final two sections will recapitulate the main themes of this thesis.

9.2 The revised constructs

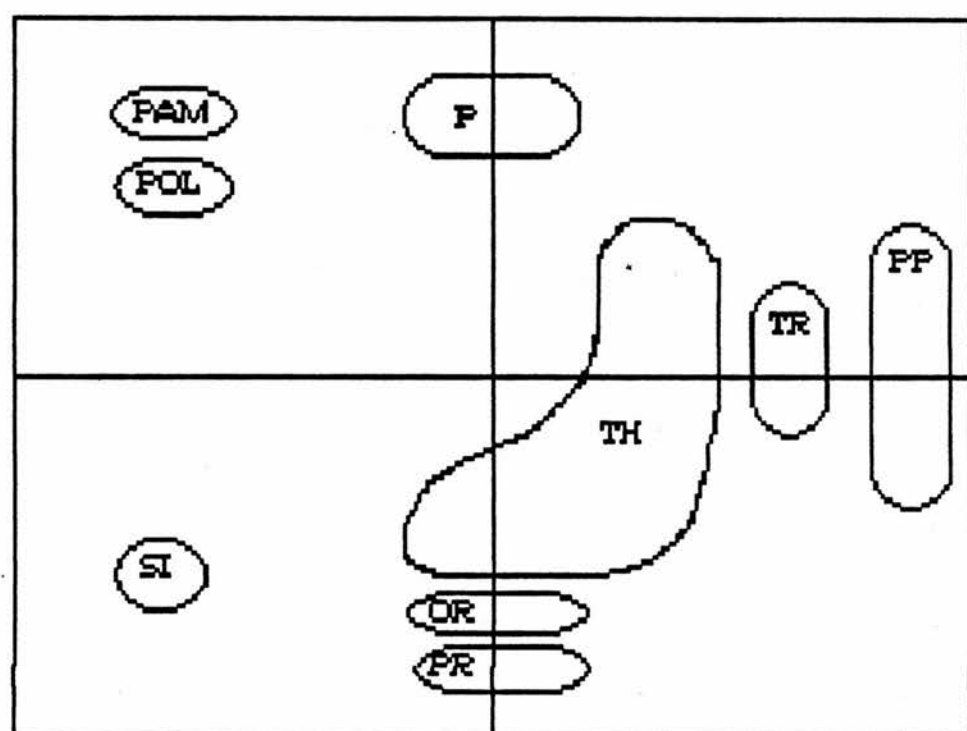
The situational operational constructs defined in Chapter 6 were not altered again. These categories, it will be recalled, referred to various aspects of the situation or environment in which the practitioner operates, including of course a number of features and attributes of the practitioner's own organisation. It is perhaps worth restating that in considering what it is that leads to practitioners choosing or being constrained to act in certain ways, one of the principal distinctions necessary for the

FIG. 9.1

Relationship of operational to
derived constructs

PAV

PLE



DESP

KT

purposes of this research is between the outer reality within which the worker operates, and the inner realm of his knowledge, thought and ideas. The situational operational constructs are therefore informed by this perspective, and do not necessarily much resemble the categories one might have selected if the focus of the study had been, say, on organisational functioning or policy processes. I would claim, in the light of the findings presented in Chapter 7 especially, that the situational constructs have proved adequately serviceable for the purposes of this study; but I would not necessarily wish to commend their literal adoption for research into the field of voluntary social action informed by a different theoretical project.

The seven practitioner-related operational constructs set out in section 6.5 were however replaced by four derived constructs, which also drew to a small extent from some of the situational operational constructs. The four new constructs are:

- DESP Definitions and explanations of social problems
- KT Theoretical knowledge
- PAV Personal attributes and values
- PLE Practice and life experience.

The relationship of the original to the derived constructs is shown diagrammatic in Fig. 9.1. The content of these will now be explained by reference to the evidence of Chapter 8.

9.2.1 Personal attributes and values

In devising the original operational constructs it was assumed there might be useful distinctions to be made between a person's political inclinations in the public realm and their more directly personal moral precepts in the private sphere. This merely echoes the classical distinction between ethics and politics. It was also assumed that an individual's biography could at least in principle be kept distinct from their ethics and politics.

The evidence of section 8.5 shows that these conceptual distinctions are probably of limited relevance in the task of understanding, and therefore anticipating, how practitioners will behave in a given situation. They are abstractions devised for other purposes, and do not seem to reflect the practitioners' sense of the structure of the attitudes and values which are important for them. For example, it was shown that several practitioners clearly embraced attitudes indicative of what is known in

philosophical terms, and in the social work literature, as the ethic of respect for persons - although that expression was never used by any of the practitioners in this study. The practitioners who supported this precept accounted for it by reference to their personal motivations and their experience in work and elsewhere. It stemmed directly from their experience, and was manifested as their own distillation of that experience; this is what gave it a living and immediate quality. Their evident adherence to such a precept could certainly not be traced through their biographies to the influence of dusty academic abstractions. On the other hand, it is reasonable to suppose that it is their experience which would enable them to understand the more abstract discourse of professional values.

The significance of biography was most obvious when practitioners accounted for their career moves, and their motivation to pursue their current job, by reference to a life crisis. There is no mistaking the quality of a turning point in many of the practitioners' stories. In three cases major illness, entailing several months' incapacity for work, precipitated changes which probably reflected underlying longer term personal development. In at least seven cases individuals found that the smooth progression of their career was disrupted either by loss or unavailability of a desired opportunity, or by growing disaffection with the path they had hitherto been following, or some combination of these factors. The practitioners did not doubt that the internal forces which in some cases had brought about a change in their career direction were being transmitted in their current situations; for all of them to various extents, their job gave them a means of expression of general personal motivations and concerns. Now it is not always possible to say with certainty whether it was a change of motivation deriving from some internal process of psychological development that led to a change of work activity, or whether on the other hand such a change of motivation may have been a reactive response after the event to changes in external opportunities. The important point in this context is that practitioners expressed their attitudes and values through the medium of their career and their own personal interpretation of it. For them, to detach their motivations and values from their biography would have rendered each unintelligible; the one found concrete expression in the other.

It was shown in the previous chapter that many of the workers in this study were politically sophisticated, while some had little interest or motivation to engage in practical party politics. Here again, it became clear that the best way to make sense of the workers' political inclinations in their current jobs was to consider their personal background; this was how the practitioners themselves created a frame of reference for

their specific political views and their propensity, or lack of it, to put them into practice. They did not speak of the intellectual merits of this or that philosopher or school of thought, beyond the occasional very general reference to socialism or liberalism. They indicated instead how associating with a trade union or a political party had at some period of their lives answered a personal desire or interest: for example, to widen their social circle, or give practical expression to a burning sense of injustice. This is not to say that some did not command a coherent analysis of contemporary issues, or demonstrate a real motivation to bring about political changes. It is rather that individuals' political interests are first and fundamentally personal, and therefore they can be appreciated only by reference to their biography and their personal values generally.

The construct of Personal Attributes and Values was developed, therefore, to denote the complex of personal beliefs, attitudes and motivations which a person expresses by entering and doing social welfare practice. These have been shown to be inseparable from the individual's biography, and to be interpreted by the individual through the medium of biography. Personal attributes and values may well be susceptible to philosophical and psychological analysis by an observer, but for the practitioner in action they have no such abstract and cognitive character; they are constituted by the agent's subjective interpretation of personal experience. To comprehend an individual's personal attributes and values we must appraise his history and his actions, and not expect to discover them dissected in the language of the disciplines which are presumed to inform practice.

9.2.2 Knowledge and experience

It will be recalled from section 6.5 that several of the operational constructs as they stood at the conclusion of the pilot were specifically focused on the practitioner's knowledge and use of theory; of these the most important were PP (practice precepts), SI (analysis of social issues), TH (theory), TR (training history and experience). This area of the analytical model was changed fundamentally in the light of the findings presented in Chapter 8, and in accordance with the conception of theory advanced in Chapter 2. The latter was, in fact, developed in response to difficulties encountered in the analysis of the empirical material of the field studies.

It was shown in the previous chapter that the generally well qualified practitioners of

this study only rarely made explicit reference to theory of which they might, from consideration of their education and experience, be expected to command a knowledge. Much more commonly, it was reasonable to infer from their statements and their actions that they probably did in fact possess a practical but implicit understanding of such knowledge which they were at best only able to articulate fairly crudely. They often seemed however to have an active awareness of the perspective and discipline informing the areas of their previous study and work experience, and were able to apply this to their current situation. This was true even when that experience had no obvious connection with the field of their present work. In general the practitioners found good use for their past experience irrespective of what field it had been in; and only occasionally did they express a sense of being handicapped by a lack of theoretical knowledge.

The propensity to utilise past experience, of whatever origin, meant that the practitioners did not make strong distinctions between what they had learnt on an academic course, what had come through experience in the current or previous jobs, and what was simply part of their general life experience. By the same token therefore, they did not immediately or necessarily separate well founded theoretical knowledge or comprehensive evidence from received wisdom or common sense, or from purely idiosyncratic aspects of their own experience. It seemed that over many issues they would find it difficult to make these distinctions about the grounds of their knowledge or belief.

Workers in the four kinds of organisation covered in this study had acquired and built up a considerable lore relating to the aims of their projects and the exigencies of the field as they understood them. They held definite opinions about the value of the various activities that they did or might pursue, and about effective ways to pursue their goals. It was possible to discern the influence of fairly authoritative models developed elsewhere and imported, more or less unconsciously, into the present arena. For example, the practitioners in the councils of voluntary service had an active awareness of the Wolfenden model (although they followed it only to a qualified extent); some of the practitioners in unemployed workers' centres were familiar with the recent history of other centres, and tried to incorporate the lessons of that experience in their own projects; the volunteer bureau workers had assimilated principles of non-directive counselling; and workers in community enterprise appreciated the issues of the continuing debate in that field around commercialism versus community benefit. With few exceptions however, the practitioners demonstrated a command only of those issues

which they had actually encountered, and tried to resolve, in their own direct experience. It was only when the general issues of their field of practice had translated themselves into concrete problems in the actual working situation that the practitioners rose to address them. This meant that their knowledge and understanding had a patchy and pragmatic quality. It became clear that, in general, it is likely to be difficult to distinguish between a practitioner's formal, abstract or theoretical knowledge and what is more particularly the fruit of his own experience. The reason for this is that the formal knowledge is only developed, or made active, when fertilised by relevant direct experience. In the process of gaining the experience and consolidating the knowledge, the practitioner usually loses sight of the sources of his understanding.

Similar observations, with perhaps even greater force, can be made about the practitioners' grasp of the notion of community development. Even the most relevantly educated and well informed practitioners put forward what might best be described as homespun ideas, woven in response to the immediate situation with whatever, sometimes meagre, materials came to hand. Although the formulations put forward would often not withstand rigorous analysis, they served nonetheless as a kind of general philosophy or rationale. Despite the affinity of the relatively primitive notions of community development offered by the practitioners with the models available in the literature, there was little evidence that the abstract models had made much direct impact on individual practitioners' conceptualisations. The practitioners had furnished their frameworks from their own experience, under the recognisable but distant and often unremembered influence of a wider professional culture.

In summary therefore, the practitioners' knowledge generally had a fairly ambiguous status. Much of it seemed to be perfectly sensible in its context, and not in any obvious way mistaken or fallacious; it could not readily be refuted by reference to relevant authoritative sources which, in many cases, simply did not exist. The practitioners' knowledge had been sifted from direct experience and to that extent had not been found wanting. On the other hand, practitioners frequently were forced to make practical judgements on the basis of fragmentary and anecdotal evidence, personal impression, hunches and uncontrolled experiment. In this respect therefore their knowledge was insecurely based and obviously prone to error.

To designate this amalgam of well founded knowledge, personal impressions, practice wisdom and the fruit of both vicarious and direct general experience, the construct KE - for knowledge and experience - was introduced. Now forms of knowledge may be

distinguished from each other on several points including type of knowledge, as discussed in Chapter 2: for example, there exist contextual and theoretical knowledge claims. A second point of distinction is the matter of validity or available validation and evidence: is it well founded? Thirdly there is the point of content: what is it about? In adopting the construct KE it was emphatically not the intention to abandon the analytical distinctions between types of knowledge argued previously in Chapter 2; to do so would certainly be fatal to any recognisable conception of science. The distinction between well founded knowledge, practice wisdom and the rest is not one of substantive content or type of knowledge, but of validation. We may say however that someone has good claim to theoretical knowledge where a belief having one of the forms of abstract or theoretical knowledge discussed in Chapter 2 is well substantiated. This may be through the practitioner's own diligent and systematic enquiry, but is perhaps most often based on the authority of acknowledged experts. We may say correspondingly that practice wisdom and the fruit of experience usually comprise more provisional, impressionistic or untested ideas, where the basis for the belief is less secure because sound corroboration cannot be demonstrated.

The analysis of the field studies demonstrates that in examining the actions, opinions and precepts of practitioners, one cannot always immediately be confident about whether one is dealing with well founded theoretical knowledge, mere personal inclination, or something in between. The content of beliefs may be similar right across the spectrum from science to superstition. Small fragments of conversation and isolated observations of practice do not by themselves reveal how secure is the basis of a practitioner's belief, opinion or precept. For this reason therefore the construct KE was adopted as a combination category for two further constructs: KT, for theoretical knowledge, and PLE, for practice and life experience.

The derived construct KT covers abstract and theoretical knowledge according to the typology of Chapter 2 and draws primarily, as might be expected, from the original operational construct TH (theoretical ideas). Also relevant however are materials subsumed under OR (origins and rationale), which is relevant if the identified practitioner had an important role in defining the nature and purposes of the organisation and in the process drew upon his theoretical knowledge. The construct PR (plans and programmes) is relevant for much the same reason as OR. The construct PP (practice precepts) is relevant where such precepts seem to embody or entail theoretical knowledge. Finally the construct TR (training history and experience) is relevant since it points out specialised knowledge which the practitioner might possess by virtue of

formal education or training.

The derived construct PLE draws from material previously classified under P (personal background information), PP (practice precepts), TH (theoretical ideas) and TR (training history and experience). Under this heading was collated the mixture of wisdom, belief, familiarity with certain sorts of situation and general inclination to one or another approach which accumulates as a residue of experience. It has already been argued in the context of the findings presented in the previous chapter that in reality there is often no satisfactory distinction to be made between what one learns in job and what comes from the wider canvas of general life experience.

It will be evident that the materials resulting from any given feasible period of observation and discussion with a practitioner, and grouped under the umbrella construct KE, cannot completely and certainly be classified into KT and PLE. However much information may be gained, there will always be a region of uncertainty at the margin, since the sources and influences are extremely diverse and far-ranging, while the data are inevitably finite.

9.2.3 Definitions and explanations of social problems

The fourth of the new, derived constructs is DESP, for definitions and explanations of social problems. This construct embodies the original SI (analysis of social issues), together with elements from OR (origins and rationale) and PR (plans and programmes). Also relevant are aspects of ARPA and ARPP (activities, routines and practices of the worker and the agency). The focus in DESP is on the social issues which workers consider they are trying to address; in this study the most prominent of these is unemployment and its consequences. The reason for drawing from ARPA and ARPP, which have previously been identified as primarily situational constructs, is that in some circumstances the practitioners' actual service activities represent the most persuasive statement of their understanding of the issues they are working on. For example, workers in unemployed workers' centres who in reality give precedence to welfare benefits advice work presumably, insofar as their actions represent their own choice of priorities, evince an opinion that this is the area in which unemployed people most need help. Actions, in the old phrase, speak louder than words.

It was shown in the previous chapter (section 8.3) that in relation to the causes and

possible remedies for unemployment, the practitioners possessed something like a well-informed lay person's knowledge. They relied mostly on the news media and ordinary public discourse for their facts and analysis, although they were by no means uncritical in the use of this material. They mostly held clear social and political attitudes and values against which they measured both the work of their own agency and wider policy processes. As regards the consequences of unemployment and the needs of unemployed people, they drew from their own experience in the work situation. The opinions thus reached were generally quite compatible with prevailing schools of thought in academic, policy-making and political communities, but practitioners were seldom actively aware of what debt they might owe to these sources.

The practitioners were very aware of the influence of the character of the local community on their work, and they commonly conceptualised the problems they were trying to address as (at least in part) attributes of the communities they were working in. They also, usually implicitly, extended the same kind of frame of reference to the communities of interest with which they were concerned. In other words, they conceived of unemployment and its effects as a social problem which needs to be understood and addressed in the context of the community in which it manifests itself; they implicitly rejected any purely individualistic, or purely macro-political, definition of unemployment. This orientation towards the community is, of course, both necessary to and congruent with the embryonic discipline of community development which was shown to inform the practitioners' approaches.

It may be thought that the derived construct DESP is no more than a particular facet of the other derived constructs. (Indeed it may be recalled that DESP is very similar to the similarly-named component of the original action model, in connection with which the same observation was made.) To conceive of a state of affairs as a social problem is to express in part some of the knowledge covered by KE and the values covered by PAV. I wish in fact to uphold this opinion, recognising that the conceptual boundaries involved are inevitably somewhat arbitrary. The reason for retaining DESP as a separate construct is that it appears to be central to the way welfare agencies in general, and voluntary organisations in particular, conceptualise and defend their role. In the world of voluntary social action, the existence of organisations and the activities of their workers are commonly explained and justified by reference to the presumed need to do something about an arguably under-recognised social ill; in the dominant frame of reference of public policy and of professionals, the existence of formal organisations devoted to social welfare makes sense only when seen in the context of an

acknowledged social need. Thus are legitimated everything from children's homes to lifeboats.

9.3 Operational constructs and the forms of knowledge

In examining the relationship between knowledge, theory and practice, two intertwined lines of argument have been pursued in this thesis. In Chapter 2 a consideration of 'theory' in social work led to an examination of the different kinds of content that might be embraced by various knowledge claims and in particular to the conclusion that theory, more precisely and properly so called, is that which makes explanation possible; it should not be merely equated with the very much larger domain of knowledge in general which includes the universe of particularities. A typology of knowledge was developed and it was proposed that explanations can be of two kinds, conformity and causal. The argument here was based on general theoretical grounds.

The second line of argument was essentially pragmatic. For the purposes of identifying and describing the various factors which it might be necessary to consider in order to explain how (if at all) a practitioner uses theory in his practice, a number of operational constructs were defined. The topics of observation denoted by the constructs were intended to be intuitively self-evident and in harmony with a commonsense view of what matters in the use of knowledge and practice. The set of constructs was linked together in the speculative action model; both the model and the constructs were successively redefined in the light of the field studies.

The two lines of argument have been somewhat separated in the exposition for the sake of clarity, but were in fact developed both simultaneously and interdependently. Their complementary relationship, and the conclusions that can be drawn by virtue of this twin-track approach, will be discussed in this section.

The operational constructs and the typology of knowledge both incorporated the premiss that a reasonably serviceable if not altogether watertight distinction exists between a knowledge of particular facts, circumstances and situations on the one hand, and of generalisations and abstractions on the other. This distinction, adumbrated in the typology of Table 2.1, is also employed in the operational constructs and the action model: the situational operational constructs identified in section 6.5 refer to what was conceived, from the practitioner's point of view, as observational and contextual

knowledge (K1 to K5). The evidence of Chapter 7 demonstrates the great significance which must be attached to the the environment in which the practitioner operates if one is to understand why he acts in a certain way; and the analysis of this material demonstrates, it must be hoped, that the situational operational constructs which informed the collection and structuring of the material were practically adequate. I wish to claim therefore that the concept of observational and contextual knowledge is coherent with and necessary to the broader theory of knowledge and action advanced in this thesis; and also that it is practically useful in designating some of the knowledge which is necessarily grasped by the practitioner. This knowledge must also be appraised by the observer who wishes to account for the practitioner's action.

Whereas the situational operational constructs and the knowledge they denote were only marginally altered in the light of the field studies, the practitioner-related operational constructs were revised radically as described above. The initial set of practitioner-related constructs represented a classification largely consonant with the typology of knowledge. Of particular significance to the present project was the operational construct 'TH' (theoretical ideas of an abstract nature; significant exemplars, parallels, analogies) which was originally used to refer to the (later expanded) category of generalised or abstract knowledge. This construct was, however, subsequently discarded for the reasons explained in section 9.2 above, and also because for obvious semantic reasons it might be confused with 'theory' in the delimited sense argued in Chapter 2. More broadly, the evidence of Chapter 8 and the analytical frame which informs it, do not support the inference that practitioners' theoretical knowledge which they use in practice is structured in the same way as the typology of Chapter 2. This conclusion is central to understanding how practitioners do actually use theory.

The interpretation of 'theory' is, as previously argued, a contentious matter; but most would agree that it entails abstract, formal and systematic knowledge. If however we compare the derived constructs against this general notion of theory, it is readily apparent that what informs practitioners is both much more and much less than theory. It is more, since the derived constructs draw from knowledge at all four levels: observational, contextual, abstract and theoretical. On the other hand, the derived constructs and the field studies on which they are based also show that practitioners frequently have to find a substitute for theory in any rigorous sense. This may be because they lack an adequate command of theory which has been formulated elsewhere, but is often too because appropriate theory simply has not been expounded. I have argued specifically that 'theory' is better used in a strict sense to denote the form

of explanation; in this sense, theory is even less evident in practitioners' approach to their work than it might be if we permitted a loose usage. From these considerations I shall argue therefore that practitioners do not in any precise sense use or apply theory as they practise. The traditional question of how theory is, might or ought to be applied to practice needs to be reframed.

9.4 Reformulation of the action model

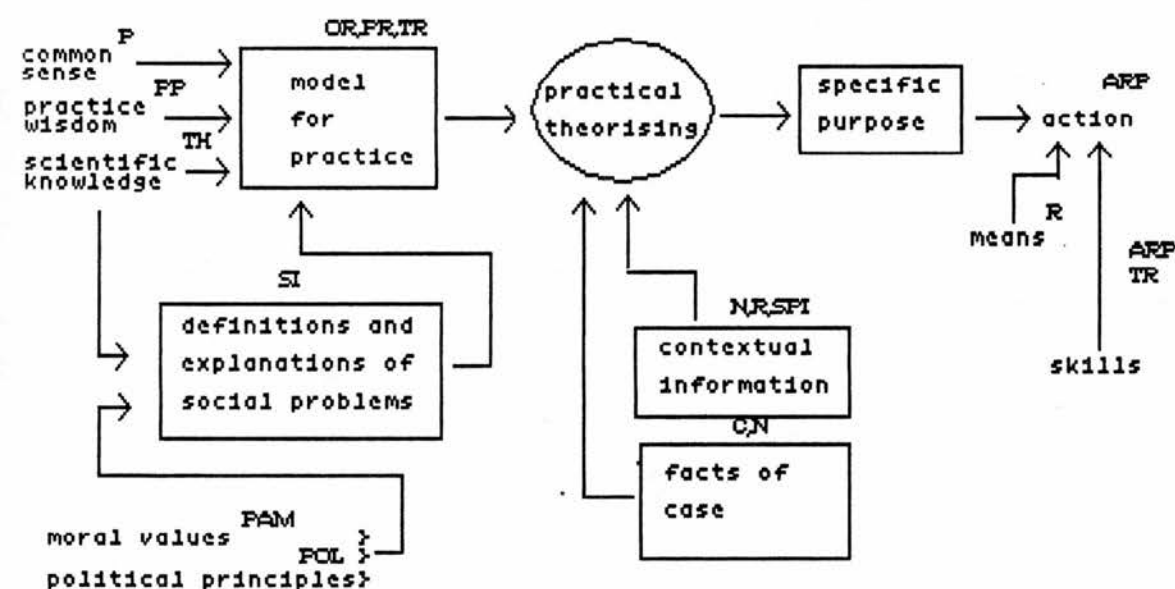
It is time now to reconsider the action model, which was first introduced in Chapter 3 as a 'dynamic hypothesis' used in this research as a device with which to explore the relationship between theory and practice. The action model is of course interdependent with the operational constructs discussed in Chapter 6. While it would be tedious to recount the many and erratic stages of the evolution of the action model, a brief summary of the process may give some insight into the rationale for the much altered model to be presented here.

The experience of the pilot study provoked considerable revision of the original speculative version of the action model. In the original version, it was postulated (cf. Fig. 3.2) that some influence from the practitioner's 'model for practice' - a relatively stable complex of knowledge and values - was combined with input from the facts of the case and the context of intervention to lead directly to a specific purpose. The experience of the pilot suggested, however, that it would be more illuminating to think of these three 'inputs' as generating some internal process of planning and reflection of which one outcome is the purpose in the case. In other words, this modification seeks to make explicit that there is a moment of reflection in the midst of action; that reacting to the stimuli of the inputs is not a mechanical but rather an intelligent process. This stage or aspect was labelled practical theorising, and is shown in Fig. 9.2.

The second major change between the models of Figs. 3.2 and 9.2 is that the various aspects of the practitioner's experience which are considered to provide the raw materials for the model for practice have been redefined so as to follow the operational constructs. What is entailed here is a move from the rather abstract suppositions of the original version to the much more practical and immediate formulations of the operational constructs; it will be recalled that the latter were specifically designed to be intuitive and self-evident to the practitioner and the observer, whereas the original

FIG. 9.2

Action model at conclusion of pilot, with operational constructs



model was much more abstruse.

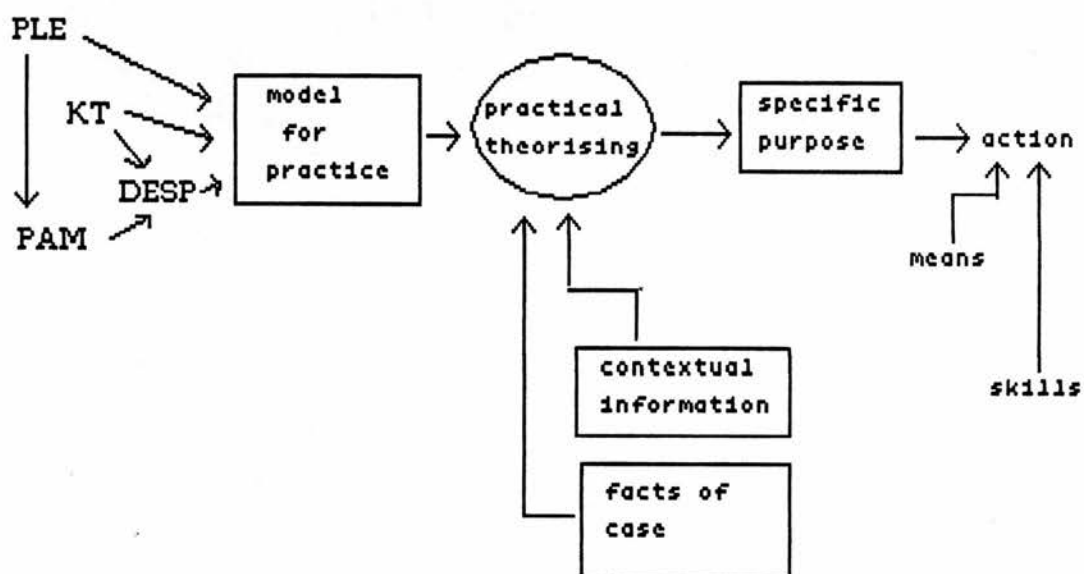
Thirdly, during the pilot phase the action model required to be linked explicitly with the operational constructs in order that the one should inform the other. This linking is also shown in Fig. 9.2, where the operational constructs as they stood at the conclusion of the pilot are associated with the action model in its then current form. At the same time, an effort was made to recognise the interrelationship of the raw materials of the model for practice, which in the original version had been left in an essentially arbitrary form. For this reason links are shown between various operational constructs which are presumed to contribute to the practitioner's model for practice.

Despite these changes, there is a continuity of the assumption that the practitioner's model for practice is something which, while drawing from the body of his knowledge and values, remains categorially distinct from them. That is to say, it is still assumed that a model for practice can truly be identified among everything else that a practitioner knows or believes; this represents the continuation of the conservative assumption of Chapter 3 that there could be a qualitative difference between one's general knowledge and values on one hand, and whatever it is that shapes the practitioner's actions on the other.

The next major stage of revision of the action model was required in response to replacement of the practitioner-related operational constructs by the derived constructs explained in the previous section of this chapter. A straightforward substitution leads to Fig. 9.3. However, it became apparent as the derived constructs were worked out from the analysis of the data that the distinction just mentioned between a person's knowledge and values generally, and the concept of a model for practice which has a distinctive and special relevance to his practice, is not tenable in its original form. Firstly, the evidence presented in the previous chapter does not tend on balance to support this categorial distinction. The typical finding was rather of a complex of well substantiated knowledge, the fruit of experience and practical wisdom, and personal biography and values which are so intimately intermingled with each other that any attempt to dissect the elements destroys the qualities they represent. To take a biological metaphor, once a living system is dismembered it loses the very properties which make it a living system; to understand how it functions it is necessary to consider it as a whole as well as in its parts. It seemed preferable therefore to seek some other way of portraying the relationship between knowledge and action than the notion of a model for practice.

FIG. 9.3

Action model: reformulation



[Following page 224]

The second reason for abandoning the notion of a model for practice was that it seemed prone to a certain ambiguity over the use of 'model'. It was argued in Chapter 2 that a model is one of a number of different kinds of knowledge. However, the findings just summarised suggest that there is much more to whatever internal factors influence practitioners' actions than merely models in the restricted sense of Chapter 2. It therefore seemed preferable in the interests of clarity and consistency to find another term.

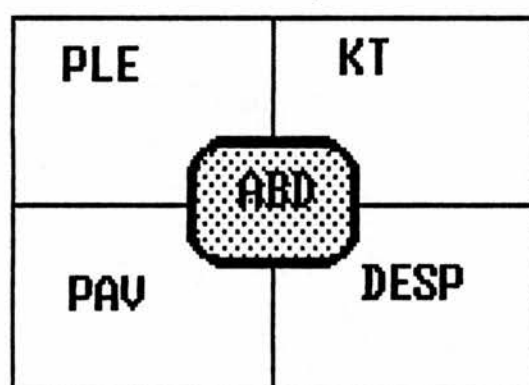
Findings of the field studies which were consistent with the original action model included the supposition that practitioners may have relevant knowledge which they do not seem to apply in practice, or have pieces of knowledge with contradictory implications. Equally they may profess values which they do not seem to succeed in applying; or express in the concrete terms of their actions principles or priorities which appear to be at variance with their own accounts of their purposes. It may seem that their daily activities are only rather poorly described by statements of official policy. They may perhaps be under such strong influences of the circumstances they work under that their distinctive individual approach has little bearing on certain aspects of the way the job is done.

In order to take account of the deficiencies of the action model in its earlier form therefore, it was reformulated on the following lines. The practitioner's system of knowledge, experience, attitude and belief which is relevant to her practice is now described as action beliefs and dispositions (ABD); this system replaces the notion of the model for practice. I mean by 'belief' to include a broad spectrum from the everyday supposition, to theoretical knowledge in its various forms, to belief in the sense of creed. I use the term 'belief' to cover this wide range of referents since, as I shall argue, it is not the content of a belief which is its distinguishing mark but the form of knowing (believing) which it represents. I argued in Chapter 2 that explanation entails an appeal to the experience of the other; here similarly, I maintain that there is necessarily always a subjective, as well as sometimes an objective, aspect to knowing. Whether a belief should count as knowledge depends on the strength of the validation, which is established by appeal to the experience of others. (This is fairly analogous to the phenomenological concept of intersubjectivity.)

A practitioner's belief is, then, something which she understands on balance to be true or probable, but which may or may not represent knowledge in the conventional sense. We have seen that a person may often be unaware of the exact content of her action

FIG. 9.4

ACTION BELIEFS AND DISPOSITIONS



beliefs and dispositions; they are only brought into action by a relevant stimulus, such as the need to solve a problem. The findings of earlier research can thus be interpreted to show that for many practitioners, merely being asked in the abstract to give verbal expression to the content of the action beliefs and dispositions is not a sufficiently strong or relevant stimulus. However, a relevant stimulus may give rise to a sense of knowing or believing which seems to inspire or influence action. The sense of knowing is a precursor and companion of action. But it is frequently difficult, and not uncommonly impossible, for the individual to say whether her sense of knowing that something is a certain way is one which other people or recognised authorities would be inclined to agree or disagree with. (Indeed she can only have a sense of knowing about this too.)

I have added the further term 'dispositions' to cover those propensities which could hardly be rated beliefs because they have little, if any, cognitive content. If, for example, it is a person's character either to be aggressive or to avoid confrontation; if they possess unacknowledged sexist or racist prejudices; if they are either by temperament steady and secure or neurotic and volatile, then there can be little doubt that these and other characteristics are likely to have an impact on their way of working.

A practitioner's action beliefs and dispositions comprise then, that system of relatively enduring personal attributes which define her characteristic way of working and give rise on the proper occasion to her sense of knowing. It is the action beliefs and dispositions that must be elucidated in order to explain practice, rather than the person's formal knowledge. Knowledge has a part to play, but only in its reflected form of a sense of knowing.

The relationship of action beliefs and dispositions to action is analogous to the relationship of theory to explanation put forward in Chapter 2. It was held that a theory is in effect a recipe or paradigm for generating satisfactory explanations. In practice, the system of action beliefs and dispositions acts as a recipe or paradigm for generating action, when taken together with the host of situational factors.

In the light of the field studies, the action beliefs and dispositions are considered to comprise a subset of the attributes classified under PLE, KT, PAV and DESP. To summarise in other words: every practitioner possesses a range of attributes which I have classified under the four derived constructs PLE, KT, PAV, DESP. Not every

attribute however can be considered immediately relevant to her practice. Those which are relevant are grouped under the heading of action beliefs and dispositions. This part of the reformulated action model is presented diagrammatically in Fig. 9.4.

It remains to be added what other changes were required in the action model both consequently of the foregoing, and for other reasons to do with devising a more apt, economical and empirically grounded account of the relationship of theory and practice. The remaining innovations concern the notion of an instance and the process of practical theorising, already referred to in passing.

The study of practitioners' work shows that much day to day activity is considered by them broadly similar to that which has been done before, and therefore to that extent draws upon a largely pre-existing framework of assumptions about proper courses of action. This simply represents the ordinary human tendency to seek regularity and routine, and to cope with present and future demands by assimilating them to past learning. This process is at work even when there are acknowledged particularities of the present case in hand. Thus for example, a volunteer bureau worker will tend to classify the needs and interests of today's new interviewee into one of a number of generally familiar categories, but (ideally) without overlooking the relevant unique characteristics of the individual before him. I shall say that because the process of practical reasoning which the practitioner follows in such a case is much the same as in other relevantly similar cases, all such work comprises a singular instance.

The usage of 'instance' adopted here may be clarified by reference to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary definition:

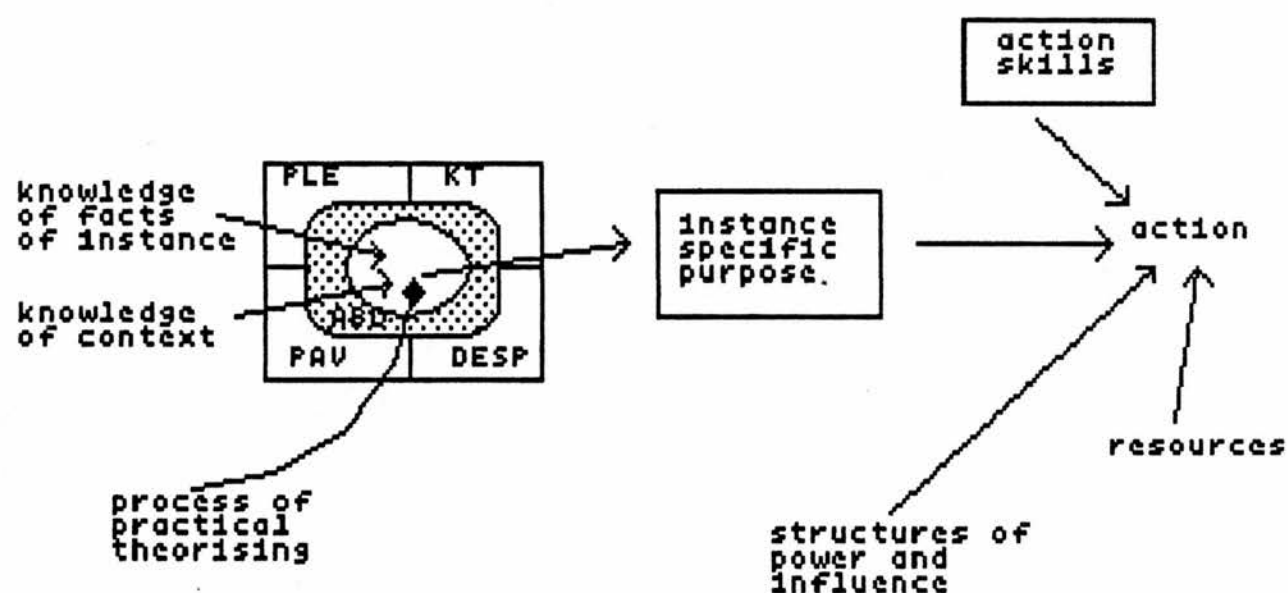
A fact or example brought forward in support of a general assertion or an argument, or in illustration of a general truth. Hence, a case, an illustrative example. Also, in broader sense, a case occurring, a recurring occasion.

I shall mean therefore by an instance either a specific case, or a group of relevantly similar cases: a 'recurring occasion'. An instance is a set of circumstances which precipitate a given understanding of phenomena, or sense of knowing, and dispose to a given course of action. I shall say that in the process of action the practitioner adopts an instance-specific purpose; such a purpose may perhaps apply to a unique situation, but will more often apply to a group of relevantly similar cases or situations.

Practical theorising is the counterpart to the concept of an instance. In Chapter 2 I

FIG. 9.5

ACTION MODEL: FINAL FORM



made the point that the characteristic mode of 'practice' is in fact both theoretical and practical; it involves painstaking information gathering and careful reflection on the individual case. Social intervention requires a form of action and practical competence which generally entails both theoretical discipline and practical theorising. As well as adducing relevant knowledge, it is the practitioner's task to theorise about the instance in hand. In doing so the uniqueness of the instance is as much an object of concern as its similarities with other comparable cases. Thus I shall say that in each instance, the practitioner considers the theoretical knowledge and contextual information available and in the light of this, formulates the instance-specific purpose by a process of practical theorising. The process and therefore the outcome of practical theorising is of course shaped by the practitioner's action beliefs and dispositions.

By combining all the arguments of this section we now arrive at the action model in its final form, shown diagrammatically in Fig. 9.5, which in effect summarises the argument of this chapter so far and indeed recapitulates the thesis. In the remainder of this chapter I shall expand on this somewhat skeletal first statement of the conception of action to which this study has led, and debate its implications.

9.5 Theory and practice: a reassessment

It was shown in Chapter 2 that the conventional doctrine on the place of knowledge in practice envisages a social science 'base' which is applied by means of 'practice theory'. The conclusions drawn above, based on the empirical material of this study, support the earlier theoretical argument that the social science knowledge/practice theory analysis is not a serviceable description of how practitioners use 'theory'. Practitioners are sometimes influenced by theories from social science, but they do not ordinarily make any direct or explicit reference to such theories. Rather, they draw from what I have termed their action beliefs and dispositions, in which formal social science knowledge is commonly only rather a small element at best. Practitioners carry the more or less distinct impressions of social science knowledge and theory which circulate in their professional and personal environment, but only comparatively rarely are they able to adduce such knowledge explicitly or cite strong relevant evidence. The social science knowledge is not, for practitioners, a base; it is more like the loom of distant lights, beckoning uncertainly.

The evidence of this study suggests the need for radical revision of the notion of 'practice theory' advocated in the orthodox doctrine. The idea of practice theory may be identified with K6 in the typology of Chapter 2: abstract knowledge comprising a procedure, model, method or algorithm. The field studies have shown that it is sometimes possible, by detailed observation and careful interview, to discern from practitioners' action the outlines of systematic methods. Their theoretical knowledge - KT in the action model - may well include relevant items of this kind. It is however incorrect to conclude from this that practice theory is the main, or only, guide. The practitioner's system of action beliefs and dispositions also comprises weighty elements of attitudes, values and life experience generally. These things will take the place of practice theory if none exists, or may well override it, if it does.

There are further respects in which the orthodox doctrine is wanting. Knowledge for practice is not limited to the theoretical knowledge of the typology (K8 - K10), which the idea of 'social science knowledge' perhaps connotes, nor to the abstract knowledge of models, etc. (K6) implied by 'practice theory'. It is clearly absolutely necessary to include as well the ordinary commonsense knowledge of social action possessed by persons of normal social competence. Perhaps it is indeed taken for granted in the conventional analysis of professional practice; but for the purpose of understanding the issues under discussion here, it is evidently an error to overlook such knowledge.

To conclude the comparison with the orthodox doctrine, it should also be noted that it fails to give a sufficient account of the place of the observational (K1 - K3) and contextual (K4 - K5) knowledge which inevitably figures large in the process of practice. In the action model I have represented this as knowledge of the facts of the instance, and knowledge of the context. The field studies, as well as ordinary experience, confirm that this bulks large in the consciousness of the practitioner; it is certainly more prominent, and more readily accessible, than the theoretical knowledge presupposed by the orthodoxy.

Besides the conventional approach, a number of alternatives were also reviewed in Chapter 2. A comparison of these with the action model may now be instructive.

Schön's (1983) analysis has the merit, among others, of identifying the nature and highlighting the significance of ordinary practical knowledge in professional practice. Schön's concept of 'knowing-in-action' has a strong similarity with the idea of action beliefs and dispositions developed from this research. Both concepts emphasise (unlike the conventional doctrine) that the motors of action are far from being restricted to the consciously apprehended and the rigorously demonstrable. The idea of action beliefs and dispositions particularly draws attention to the quality of such knowledge: that it subsists in belief and personal habits of mind, rather than in the abstract propositions of formal science.

In Kronman's (1986) analysis, the hallmark of practitioners' action is the facility to bring a general theoretical knowledge of their field to bear effectively on specific cases. He calls this quality 'practical wisdom' or 'sound judgement', and suggests it requires a specific faculty of imagination. Kronman's approach is fairly complementary to the second plank of Schön's analysis, which postulates a process of 'reflection-in-action'. The concept of practical theorising advanced above has a close affinity with the processes both Kronman and Schön indicate. All three versions seek to describe, within the constraints of language, the fluid, unlogical, intuitive, expressive and erratic character of ordinary thinking and problem-solving. Perhaps however it is only necessary to try to describe this familiar if elusive process in order to ease the escape from the mechanistic models inherited from positivism.

The action model proposes that the effective unit of this process of practical theorising and ordinary problem-solving is what has been defined as an instance. This can easily be related to Harrison's (1987) classification of workers' responses to cases as falling

into three types according to levels of difficulty: routine, difficult and unknown. Routine cases represent a familiar instance. In such cases, the worker deploys his understanding of the instance without usually explicating it. Unusual or difficult cases generate a new instance, which must be addressed by a process of practical reasoning, drawing upon the worker's existing system of action beliefs and dispositions. Cases which take the worker into the unknown require a process of learning and development in which the action beliefs and dispositions will be altered.

The central question of this research has been how practitioners use theory or knowledge. It may now be seen that an answer must be given in two parts. In the first place, one must be clear what 'theory' denotes. I have argued that this issue has been inadequately problematised both in the professional literature and in ordinary practice. In this study I have developed a theoretical analysis of the issue and related it to a discovery of the theoretical and other knowledge that practitioners possess. The second part of the question is to do with the use of knowledge in the processes of practice. The principal themes to emerge from this study will be reviewed in what follows.

The possibility of applying theory in any conventionally exact sense is in practice profoundly limited. Broadly speaking there are two sorts of reasons for this. The first is related to the nature of knowledge. I have argued that the codified knowledge which practitioners might usefully draw upon covers only a relatively small part of that which they arguably need to know. This is unlikely to change, however much social science advances, since the mastery of familiar problems inevitably soon gives way to engagement with new ones. I have shown that practitioners' knowledge is usually patchy and rather ambiguously validated. I have further argued that there is much more significance in the everyday knowledge of social action than is recognised in standard treatments of the question of the application of theory.

The second kind of reason for the difficulty of applying theory relates to the nature of expertise and ordinary human reasoning. Far from resembling the formal logic of scientific method, it is a multidimensional and non-linear process largely invisible to its possessor. It is guided not only by the strictly cognitive, but largely by a complex of notions which we ordinarily recognise as attitudes, values, and the outcome of life experience. It is important to see that the quality of ordinary reasoning is in fact a corollary of the nature of ordinary knowledge. It is precisely because of the patchiness and uncertainty of ordinary knowledge that ordinary reasoning must be of a kind that

can function without proper scientific knowledge - which is, after all, a modern invention.

The processes of ordinary problem-solving indicated here will be recognised as strictly complementary to the faculties of the expert which were discussed in Chapter 3. It was emphasised there that expertise is, for most of the time, largely invisible both to its possessor and to others who draw upon it. Only exceptionally do we attempt to scrutinise its content and weigh its validity. Practitioners in any field normally possess at least a modest expertise in the everyday acts of their craft; both they and the consumers of their efforts will tend to expect that the expert will respond appropriately to the demands typical of their practice situation. Paradoxically however, although we may say that we expect a practitioner to 'know what he is doing', in reality the practitioner often does not really know how he comes to make this or that judgement; he is guided rather by what I have termed the sense of knowing which comes from familiarity with the instance. The process of practical reasoning which the expert carries out is focused on the relevant instance, just as the practitioner's is; and when dealing with a familiar instance, the expert and the practitioner both rely on their mastery of it, which is largely transparent to themselves.

How then are we to evaluate the validity of a practitioner's practical reasoning? I have argued that to look for his 'theory' is to be searching in entirely the wrong place. The most telling test is to examine his handling of relevant instances in the sense I have defined. The definition of an expertise then becomes the definition of the relevant instances. This is not, however, to be confused with a mere arbitrary catalogue of operational competences. The action model attempts to show that the process of practical theorising which eventuates in the instance specific purpose, is channelled by the form and content of the individual's action beliefs and dispositions. These have a deep structure which draws from a whole range of knowledge, values and dispositions, and which we ordinarily interpret as the outcome of biography. Such resources enable the practitioner to apply his imagination (in Kronman's term) to address new instances. Without this faculty, we would be dealing not with the creative intellect capable of practical theorising, but with a possibly knowledgeable, but always inert repository of solutions to yesterday's problems.

9.6 On knowing and doing ...

The purpose of this and the final sections is to summarise the findings of this study, and to restate the argument about the relationship of theory and practice in ordinary language without reliance on the more technical and esoteric tools developed to facilitate the process of the research.

In Chapter 2 I argued, *inter alia*, that the conventional doctrine of social work theory as comprising borrowings from social science augmented or mediated by 'practice theory' is both internally inconsistent with its own empiricist premisses, and also unsatisfactory as an account of what may readily be observed from practice. I submit the evidence here in support of both legs of the argument. Social science is distinguished from 'practice theory' not only, as conventionally held, in that the two entities have, either contingently or necessarily, different degrees of validation; they also have different referents and serve different uses. I wish however to transcend the conventional social science versus practice theory distinction on the further basis that the empirical material of this study demonstrates that the distinction is neither conceptually sound nor accurately descriptive.

This study began with the postulate that practitioners are guided not by knowledge or theory in the conventional sense, but by what was termed a model for practice. In the light of analysis of the beliefs and actions of practitioners in the chosen field, this concept was replaced with the formulation that practitioners are guided by a set of action beliefs and dispositions which draws variously on the whole spectrum of the individual's knowledge, values, biography and experience. It was shown earlier that the action beliefs and dispositions comprise a complex of knowledge, belief, and opinion of which, for the practitioners in this study, only a relatively small proportion could be shown to have a substantial social science foundation.

The practitioner's dominant beliefs in any given situation are by no means necessarily those which have the best grounds for support, looked at from an objective point of view; and frequently, it is personal impressions, priorities and values which are of the greatest significance. Frequently, too, for the practitioners in this study, there was no better source of guidance available than the commonplace and common sense knowledge available to any reasonably well informed person. Practitioners built up their knowledge from their work and personal experience and from popular sources such as the news media. They also relied extensively on colleagues, associates and networks of

interest. Only rarely did they acknowledge or recognise any explicit reliance on formal academic sources. Their formal training, sometimes in subjects remote from social or community work, was one of the sources they used, but they were not in general able to recall course content in specific detail. They were sometimes quite strongly conscious of some of the foundation principles of their fields of previous study, and sometimes the personal experience of being a student was every bit as significant as other experiences. Sometimes particular events or the knowledge of particular situations were invested with a special exemplary status, serving as inspirations or warnings; but the force of these exemplars or anecdotes bore no necessary relation to how representative or soundly based they might be from the viewpoint of a detached and knowledgeable observer.

Practitioners quite evidently used their knowledge and the fruit of experience extensively in their work. They usually did so in the context of specific practical situations and their reasoning was of an intuitive, rather than formally deductive, character. Their values and principles of action based on this experience were firmly internalised, but were not ordinarily made explicit in abstract terms. It usually required the practical demands of the concrete situation, or at least the retrospective rehearsal of it, to evoke the expression of their action beliefs and dispositions.

Often operating in conditions of relative ignorance, the practitioners felt their way half-seeing. They made their plans and discoveries through the medium of practical action and concurrently with it, and mostly not by any strategic process of prior or anticipatory ratiocination. They used chance opportunities and serendipity much more prominently than strategic plans conceived in advance. They looked for stepping stones across turbulent and unknown waters which they were obliged to negotiate in crepuscular conditions, very often through no fault of their own. They tended to follow a strategy of maximising apparent advantages or minimising apparent risks under conditions where there was frequently very little hard information. But it could also be said that there were times when a more rigorous approach would have been possible, and probably advantageous. Most of the practitioners did not appear to incline naturally to analytic rigour.

I have described the practitioners' way of working as practical theorising. While being obviously practical in character, this process does also merit the appellation 'theorising' because it entails classification, the search for patterns and regularities, and above all the business of practically adequate explanation and prediction. It partakes therefore of

the essential characteristics of theoretical knowledge. It is emphatically not the mechanical application of inert facts, but represents the intelligent use of complex and disparate knowledge at all levels.

Although the knowledge practitioners commanded was often not particularly specialised or difficult for anyone of ordinary abilities to comprehend, they were usually quite skilful at applying and manipulating it in the context of practice. The practitioners were thus sophisticated in the use and application of common knowledge to the demands of their particular situation. This expertise was constantly fashioned and refashioned incrementally from the whole of their practice and life experience; it was not primarily based on the use of literature or other academic sources.

While the practitioners were obliged to operate in conditions of high uncertainty, they nevertheless distinguished patterns and regularities in their work and from these, created informal rules of action. I have defined situations which were seen to represent examples of classes of like circumstances as instances. When faced with a known instance, practitioners were able with minimal deliberation to resort to the formulae that they had built up implicitly through previous relevantly similar experiences. They then adopted the relevant purpose for that case or situation, which I defined as the instance-specific purpose. Although a high proportion of everyday work entailed familiar instances, practitioners were often able to articulate their habitual rules of action only very incompletely, if at all.

In reviewing the practitioners' work it was suggested that an elementary understanding of a nascent professional discipline of community development could be detected in their approach. However, this remained at a primitive level, and reflected less on the competence of the practitioners in this study than on the state of the art generally. The practitioners lacked usable textbook precepts to help them decide many of the questions they faced. They experienced irresolvable tensions between such models as they were roughly familiar with and what seemed to be the incompatible exigencies of the situations they were actually working in. Although there was certainly scope for them to have been better informed on this and other relevant subjects than most of them actually were, there is no reason to think this would have had a major impact on their effectiveness. The practitioners in this study were operating in a field which has received comparatively little attention from theoreticians of practice; they were forced to work at the very margins of knowledge. While the personal and social impacts of unemployment are now well documented, the business of devising appropriate small-

scale, locality based, and non statutory forms of social action to deal with the issues remains highly tentative and experimental. In this respect therefore their situation was different from that of practitioners who work in the mainstream, whose practice is both informed and constrained by well established routines, agency and public expectations, and a body of relevant research.

The practitioners' values and personal dispositions could readily and clearly be identified by reference to their work and personal histories, and their perceptions of current issues. As with knowledge, the concrete expression of their dispositions to act according to this or that principle was to be found primarily in the arena of practice rather than in the discussion of abstract questions. The practitioners' personal ambitions, interests, talents and anxieties strongly affected what they chose to take on, or leave aside; these attributes equally coloured how they conducted their work. Questions of the relevance and feasibility of any particular activity would be conditioned by a world view, which though constantly formed and reformed in the arena of practice, was not usually debated there in the abstract; rather, it was specific situations which would be debated.

How then do practitioners use 'knowledge' or 'theory' in 'practice'? The conclusion I have argued is that they do not actually use theory in any strict sense of the term. It is rather that they are equipped with what I have designated action beliefs and dispositions. The action beliefs and dispositions build up as a sediment from the totality of the practitioner's experience, which includes but is certainly not restricted to exposure to theory properly so called; and at least for practitioners working in a marginal area of social welfare practice, one can only conclude that theory proper is a relatively small contributor to the totality of their action beliefs and dispositions. Correspondingly, the application of knowledge bears practically no affinity to the logic of the hypothetico-deductive model favoured by scientific methodologists and aped by social work writers. Practitioners formulate their projects and express their intentions by a process of reasoning which is characteristically, though not invariably, both inductive and intuitive. It is carried on in the midst of action, not separately from it; as a rule it is not exposed to rigorous abstract analysis. Practitioners are guided then not by knowledge, but by a sense of knowing; they believe they can anticipate and apprehend much at least of what any piece of work is likely to throw up. The sense of knowing insulates one from the unknown, which forever threatens.

9.7 ... and on working in the real world

I have argued throughout this study that there is more to understanding the behaviour of practitioners than could be accounted for by their knowledge and values. I have examined the external as well as the internal factors which enabled or constrained the practitioners, and in the action model I have suggested how the relationship of these factors might be understood. I would not wish to claim that the action model, primarily and always an exploratory device, has been comprehensively validated or vindicated as a result of this research; but I would submit that it has served the primary purpose of facilitating a theoretically coherent and empirically based analysis of practitioners' use of knowledge. The secondary purpose was to draw attention to the major influences which must be entered into the account in addition to the practitioner's knowledge and values, which were examined for the field of this research in Chapter 7.

It must be concluded from this study that practitioners in small and somewhat marginal voluntary organisations are highly liable to be subject to enormous influences which they are relatively powerless to control. In selecting voluntary action as the field for the research, it had been thought that the situation of the key practitioner in the very small voluntary organisation might prove particularly informative as a testing ground for ideas about how practitioners use knowledge. Such practitioners were presumed to be relatively free of the bureaucratic and organisational constraints faced by their colleagues in large statutory bodies. The character of their organisation might have been expected to be a reflection of their own ideas and priorities, writ large; for research purposes this would have the advantage that one could be more confident that the worker's actions represented her own choice rather than an organisational subculture or directions from management.

This set of assumptions was only partially confirmed. While practitioners in small voluntary organisations do undoubtedly set a very personal stamp on everything the organisation does, at the same time their freedom of manoeuvre was limited by the volume and nature of the resources available to them, and the terms on which they were forced to accept resources. Their flexibility and autonomy, those highly prized attributes of voluntary organisations, existed in reality only within a framework defined by others. The organisations, too, were constrained by the obverse of their freedom. While they might choose to do anything that appeared interesting and relevant and which was not ruled out by funding constraints, they were also limited in their choice

by the knowledge, skill and imagination of their key workers; they did not have the range and variety of resources that a large organisation can command.

The exploration of practice informed by the action model confirms the range, significance and complexity of the situational factors, and has begun the task of mapping them. These factors relate to the second half of the story of why practitioners act in the way they do, while the first half turns on the individual practitioner's action beliefs and dispositions. It would be highly presumptuous to claim that the analysis of action propounded in this thesis offers an entirely adequate scheme for understanding working in voluntary organisations, let alone the whole of social welfare practice. The reality is certainly more complex, and probably more variable, than that. I hope to have shown nonetheless that an advance can be made on previous work in this field.

APPENDIX

Index of special terms in order of first principal mention

<u>Term</u>	<u>Chapt./section</u>
practice theory	2.1
knowledge base	2.2
conformity explanation	2.3
causal explanation	2.3
inductive inference	2.3
model for practice	3.2
dynamic hypothesis	3.2
action model	3.2
conservative assumption	3.2.1
expert observer	3.3
welfare model	4.4
prevention model	4.4
operational constructs	6.1
derived constructs	9.1
practical theorising	9.4
action beliefs and dispositions	9.4
sense of knowing	9.4
instance	9.4
instance specific purpose	9.4

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Note on publications

A slightly modified version of Chapters 4 and 5 was published as:

'Voluntary action on unemployment' in McCrone, D., ed. (1987), Scottish Government Yearbook 1987, University of Edinburgh.

An abridgement of the above article was subsequently published as:

Voluntary action on unemployment: a Scottish perspective, Berkhamsted, The Volunteer Centre UK, 1987.

Other related material appeared in the following chapter:

'Unemployment, day care and community development' in Horobin, G., ed. (1987), Why day care?, London, Jessica Kingsley.